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Editorial

We are living in times witnessing the beginnings of a new phase in the history of the Church. With the arrival of Pope Francis in Vatican, authoritarian or centralizing forms of organization are slowly but steadily giving way to a synodal church where laity, pastors and the bishop of Rome journey together. Marking the 50th anniversary of the institution of the Synod of Bishops at Vatican on October 17, 2015, Pope Francis outlined his vision for a synodal Church.

The Post-modern world in which we live demands the path of synodality. The world is becoming more and more unified into a global village but at the same time, people and national cultures seek self-expression more than ever before. The individuals are aware of their dignity and they want to assert their liberty. Traditional authority is no longer respected. Individualism is preferred to life in community. The present society is moving irreversibly towards a new era of decentralization. Therefore, the Church of the future depends heavily upon its determined efforts towards decentralization and participative communion.

Vatican II has reopened the door for a synodal church by emphasizing on People of God and the equality of all members of the Church which derives from their participation through baptism in the priestly, prophetic and royal function of Jesus Christ. Even though there are a variety of roles, functions, services and ministries in the Church, all persons are fundamentally equal, co-responsible and interdependent. The indwelling of the Spirit and the distribution of specific charisms make a person a free, responsible and active subject and an absolutely irreplaceable and indispensable member in the Church. An infinite variety of possibilities is contained in each individual. Everyone has the right to

be listened to in spheres in which he/she has the feeling of competence because through baptism and confirmation all members of the church have been anointed by the Spirit. If there is any exclusion or discrimination in the community, it loses its credibility as People of God, as a sign of the Kingdom and of the eschatological community.

The Church is the People of God called and sent into the world with a mission (AG 2). The entire church from top to bottom is missionary and every church exists in a missionary situation. "It is the whole Church that receives the mission to evangelize, and the work of each individual member is important for the whole" (EN 15). Pope Francis says, "Mission is something I cannot uproot from my being without destroying my very self. I *am a mission* on this earth; that is the reason why I am here in this world" (EG 273). To fulfil this missionary dimension, the Church has to be "synodal" at three levels: the laity and their bishop, the bishops in their episcopal conferences and finally the bishops and the pope.

To be a synodal Church, Pope Francis says, the structure has to be "an upside down pyramid" with the top on the bottom. The hierarchical ministers are called from the People of God in order to serve them. Christ willed a structured community and from within the community of his disciples he chose the Twelve. For besides the Twelve, there were other followers who were with Jesus from the start of the ministry. *Ad Gentes* states: "The apostles were the seeds of the New Israel and at the same time the origin of the sacred hierarchy" (AG 5). Therefore, the ministers exist not apart from or before or above the members of the Church but within the ecclesial communion. The priest who acts *in persona Christi* can do so only because the minister stands also *in persona ecclesiae*. Therefore, Pope Francis categorically states that the only authority in the Church is the authority of service and the only power is the power of the cross.

Seeing the urgency of opting for synodality as way of life in the Church, we have chosen in this issue the theme of "Synodal Church". In his essay, Francis Gonsalves focuses on the contextual and ecclesial challenges of the synodality of the Church in the Indian context and

invites us to have a change of heart and mindset and go beyond the clericalism, hierarchism and institutionalization to create participative structures by delinking the ministerial function of the clergy from administrative tasks and empowering the laity to be co-responsible for the life and mission of the Church.

Francis Thonippara looks back to the history of synodal character of the church and points out that the church is by nature synodal and this character was kept up in the early church but later lost due to extreme centralization which caused divisions in the church. But Vatican II has rediscovered it by complementing the church as Body of Christ with that of People of God and by promoting synods and assemblies.

Henry Angel discusses the exercising of authority in the catholic church by pointing out its goal as growth in God-intended fullness of life, style like Moses' co-responsibility and Jesus' service and functions as service of truth, diversity, communion and unity.

In his essay, Errol A. D'Lima points out the contribution of Vatican II and post-Vatican II documents towards the synodality of the church by emphasizing on the People of God as the primary subject in the Church and the co-responsibility of the laity in carrying out the mission as well as governance of the Church.

According to Sebastian Athappilly, the synodality has to be worked out in different aspects of church's life like exercising the power of Pope by creating a body consisting of the heads of all the individual churches, the election of Pope by incorporating lay representatives and delegating certain powers with lay faithful. He suggests that the life of the Trinity and self emptying of Jesus Christ have to affect and permeate every domain of the church.

The Church of the future depends greatly upon its readiness to be synodal at every level by all listening to the Spirit speaking through its own peoples, through the poor, through other religions and secular movements, and learning from each other. The Apostles took every decision in communion with the Holy Spirit. Hence, the Synod of

Jerusalem used the formula: "It has seemed good to the Holy Ghost and to us" (Acts 15:28). The Holy Spirit works as he wills, when he wills and where he wills (EG 279). Let the Church hearken more intensely to "what the Spirit says to the Churches" (Rev 2:7) and become a synodal Church connected to the base, to the grassroots.

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Challenges of Being a Synodal Church Today An Indian Perspective

Francis Gonsalves

The article evaluates the synodality of the Church from the particular perspective of the Indian Church. Situating the 'minority' Indian Church within the larger landscape of the Indian religio-socio-political scenario, the author highlights the inseparability of religion and politics, and the aggressive rise of Hindutva coupled with the phenomenon of a 'democratization of religion' which has made possible more participation and sharing of power with groups hitherto relegated to the bottom of caste, class and creedal pyramids. In this context, the Indian Church is plagued by viruses of caste, clericalism, hierarchy, institutionalization, neglect of lay faithful, lack of apostolic and pastoral planning, and failure to read and respond to the 'signs of the times' and 'signs of places'. As antidote to these viruses, there is need for conversion and change of heart of clergy as well as laity.

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1. Introduction:

Need for Listening and Journeying Together

Since its birth, the Church has nurtured a spirit of genuine collegiality led by God's Spirit.¹ The Council of Jerusalem (Acts 15) is a prototype of a synodal way of functioning characterizing early Christianity.² There have sometimes been conflicts with popes, leading to the conciliarists,

¹ See Myles M. Bourke, "Collegial Decision-Making in the New Testament," in *Who Decides for the Church? Studies in Co-Responsibility*, ed. J.A. Coriden, Hartford, Connecticut, The Canon Law Society of America, 1971, pp.1-13.

² See John E. Lynch, "Co-Responsibility in the First Five Centuries: Presbyteral Colleges and the Election of Bishops," in *ibid.*, pp.14-53.

for example, contesting papal authority.³ Yet, the word 'synod' has gained currency in the glow of Vatican II's *aggiornamento*, with Pope Paul VI outlining synodal principles in *Apostolica Sollicitudo*.⁴ Subsequently, St John Paul II,⁵ and Benedict XVI, further fostered the spirit of collegiality. Now, Pope Francis widens the circles of synodality with greater outreach to families and youth, worldwide - so as to listen to God's Spirit. He opines:

A synodal Church is a Church which *listens*, which realizes that *listening* 'is more than simply hearing'. It is a mutual *listening* in which everyone has something to learn. The faithful people, the college of bishops, the Bishop of Rome: all *listening* to each other, and all *listening* to the Holy Spirit, the 'Spirit of truth' (Jn 14:17), in order to know what he 'says to the Churches' (Rev 2:7).⁶

Pope Francis explains that synodality is built on a: '*Quod omnes tangit ab omnibus tractari debet*' principle - 'What touches all should be considered and approved by all'. He affirms that: "It is precisely this path of *synodality* which God expects of the Church of the third millennium. What the Lord is asking of us is already in some sense present in the very word 'synod'. Journeying together - laity, pastors, the Bishop of Rome." He also realizes that: "This (synod) is an easy concept to put into words, but not so easy to put into practice."⁷

³ See Brian Tierney, *Foundations of the Conciliar Theory: The Contribution of the Medieval Canonists from Gratian to the Great Schism*, Cambridge: University Press, 1955, pp.179-198.

⁴ Text available on the internet at http://w2.vatican.va/content/paul-vi/en/motu_proprio/documents/hf_p-vi_motu-proprio_19650915_apostolica-sollicitudo.html. The focus is on starting the 'Synod of Bishops'.

⁵ See, for instance, his 'Discourse to the Council of the General Secretariat of the Synod of Bishops' on the 'Theological Basis for the Synod of Bishops' of April 30, 1983; and, his 'Discourse at the Extraordinary Consistory of the College of Cardinals of June 13-14, 1994.

⁶ See the Address of Pope Francis at the ceremony commemorating the 50th Anniversary of the Institution of the Synod of Bishops at the Vatican on October 17, 2015. Text available on the internet; italics added.

⁷ Ibid.

In this article, I will concretely assess synodality in the Indian Church. As a framework, I first map the religious landscape in India to see how religion functions therein. Then, I examine some of the challenges and possibilities of synodal functioning, which might help us to achieve the ‘journeying together’ which Pope Francis envisages.

2. The ‘Little Flock’ of Christians in the Religious Landscape of India

We look at the religious scenario of India, in general, to see how the ideals of religion, democracy, power-sharing, co-responsibility, participation, etc., work in practice rather than in theory. By so doing we will see how the macro, national religio-socio-political setup influences the functioning of micro communities - one of which is the Indian Church comprising of Indian Christians of diverse backgrounds.

2.1. *The Inseparable Marriage of the Secular and the Sacred*

India is a democratic republic with a unique secular character. While many countries of the West maintain a strict separation between the secular (politics) and sacred (religion) realms, this is not seen in India since religion encompasses every realm of life. Realizing this, freedom fighters like Gandhi, Ambedkar and Nehru sought to harmonize religion and politics. Nehru strove to divorce religion from politics and keep the state neutral towards all forms of religion (*dharma nirpekshata*), while Gandhi intended that all religions be treated with equal respect (*sarva dharma samābhava*) within a caste-Hindu framework. Differing from Gandhi, Ambedkar critiqued Hinduism - especially the caste system - ⁸ and led many Hindus of the so-called ‘backward castes’ to reject Hinduism and convert to Buddhism.

Today, Indian secularism is a hotly debated issue with some politicians and their parties accusing others of pandering to religious minorities - mainly Muslims and Christians - with allegations of appeasement of minorities, pseudo-secularism, etc. In sum, religion and politics are handy tools for those with vested interests to exploit when needed.

⁸ See, for instance, B.R. Ambedkar, *Annihilation of Caste: With a Reply to ‘Mahatma’ Gandhi*, Bangalore, Dalit Sahitya Akademi, 1987, for his scathing critique of caste and his debates with Gandhi.

2.2. *The Rise of Conflicting Nationalisms: Indian and Hindutva*

Linked to the inseparability of politics and religion, is the question of Indian nationalism. Today, those in power arbitrarily label some Indians as unpatriotic, aliens, anti-national, etc., and stake claims to own this multilingual, multicultural and multi-religious nation-state. We distinguish between 'nation' (cultural entity) and 'state' (political entity).⁹ India is 'nation' to over a billion citizens of diverse cultures, creeds, classes and castes; and, as a 'state', India is governed by the Constitution, which seeks to give all citizens certain rights based on principles of equity, fairness and justice. Thus, the Constitution guarantees Christians 'minority rights' to help promote their religion.

In India, especially over the past three decades or so, the borders of the *state* are being blurred with issues of *nation* and *nationalism*. This has created confrontations between those who endorse a particular brand of nationalism called *Hindutva* and those excluded from it.¹⁰ The main aim of *Hindutva* is to establish a Hindu nation with caste-based structures. In striving to build a *Hindu Rashtra*, the ideologues of *Hindutva* brazenly defy Constitutional guarantees by taking law into their own hands on highly sensitive issues like *gau-rakshan* (cow protection), construction of the Ram Mandir, religious conversions and *ghar-vapasi* (literally 'homecoming', referring to forcible conversions of Muslims and Christians to Hinduism). In the face of such '*Hinduization*' of India, the Christian minority tends to withdraw into its own ghettos, thereby contributing little to the cause of constructing a vibrant India.

⁹ See T.K. Oommen, *State and Society in India: Studies in Nation-Building*, New Delhi, Sage Publications, 1990, pp. 12, 31-42 for further clarifications with regard to nation, state and ethnicity.

¹⁰ *Hindutva* is not synonymous with Hinduism. The former refers to a militant brand of Hinduism aggressively propagated by the Hindu Right; the latter, to the normal practice of Hinduism. See V.D. Savarkar, *Hindutva*, Bombay, Veer Savarkar Prakashan, 1969.

2.3. *The Democratization of Religion as Defiance of Caste Hierarchism*

The mixing of religion with politics and the rapid growth of Hindutva has given rise to new forms of religious practices. For example, first, attempts are being made to retain power among the so-called ‘upper castes’ by enforcing elite practices like revival of the study of Sanskrit and astrology, recital of Gayatri mantra and installation of Hindu idols in schools, making yoga compulsory, propagating cow-protection, etc. Second, on the one hand, there is a devious attempt at ‘assimilation’ of some members of the so-called ‘lower castes’ into the majority religion to peddle the lie that everyone is equal in society, while, on the other, aggressive ‘alienation’ and violence is unleashed on the religious minorities and those who resist assimilation.¹¹ Third, having suffered violence for centuries, the Dalits, adivasis and women are now asserting themselves, organizing themselves into movements, demanding their rights, converting to other religions, and even taking up arms to defend themselves.

As outcome of the avatars that religion is assuming, we have today what can be called a ‘democratization of religion’. Formerly, most religions were practised within a hierarchical, pyramidal structure with a small clerical-priestly class in the upper strata enjoying maximum powers since they officiated in ‘sacred services’ while those at the bottom were passive ‘recipients’ of these. Now, through democratization of religion, power is more widely enjoyed among believers. This implies that many more common folk assume leadership, wield authority, interpret scriptures, mediate cultic practices, assume prophetic-priestly roles and determine religious policies.

The democratization of religion has been catalyzed by globalization, the InfoTech revolution and processes of the Indian state with institutions like the Supreme Court and Parliament reforming unjust socio-religious practices like untouchability, dowry system, triple talaq,

¹¹ See *A Report – 365 Days: Democracy and Secularism under the Modi Regime*, ed. John Dayal & Shabnam Hashmi, Delhi, Anhad, 2015, for details of many cases of violence and for understanding the causes.

exploitation of women, etc.¹² Consequently, more commoners wield great power in the religio-political realm. For example, the Chief Minister of UP, Yogi Adityanand and yogi-entrepreneur Baba Ramdev are immensely influential, as is the semi-literate, Dalit Mata Amritanandamayi, the 'Hugging Amma' who has a large global following.

The democratization of religion is seen in Christianity, too, as many believers accept leaders not on account of ordination but by virtue of their personal charism and competence to preach effectively. Thousands have left the Catholic Church to join evangelical groups, and many lapsed Catholics have become pastors. So also, since conversion is a controversial issue in India, many of those who love Jesus and are unable to be baptized, often assemble to pray, sing *bhajans* and reflect upon scripture. For example, the *Krist-bhaktas* of Varanasi are Hindus who consider Jesus as their *ishtadeva*. Many of the leaders are simple, unlettered believers. This shows that common people are no longer passive 'consumers' of religion but seek agency and power that religion brings.

3. Challenges which the Indian Church Faces in Synodality

Having seen the Indian religious scene and how religions are assuming new avatars in society, we discuss some challenges that the Indian Church faces - especially with regard to synodality, sharing of power, decision-making and participatory processes.

3.1. Solidified Clerical Hierarchy - Vestiges of a Caste-Conscious Society

Tainted by social structures, the Indian Church is largely hierarchical in structure and functioning. Being appointed as bishop is often seen as a promotion with more power in society rather than as a vocation to

¹² Pratap Bhanu Mehta, "Hinduism and Self-Rule," in *World Religions and Democracy*, ed. L. Diamond et al., Baltimore and London, Johns Hopkins University Press, 2005, pp.56-69, argues that Hinduism has been adapting to changing eco-socio-political processes.

love and serve God's people. Many bishops live in luxury with neither much concern for the spiritual welfare of their priests, nor possessing first-hand experiences of their people. Episcopal elections are seen as events to elevate candidates from one's own caste so as to promote narrow caste privileges and powers.

Caste concerns being highly sensitive are not openly discussed; for, Christianity preaches equality in theory. But, in his November 2003 'Address to the Indian Bishops on their *Ad Limina* Visit', St. John Paul II specifically mentioned the problem of caste. He said:

[E]ven those who have been ordained to service can at times fall victim to unhealthy cultural or societal trends which undermine their credibility and seriously hamper their mission. As men of faith, priests must not let the temptation of power or material gain distract them from their vocations, nor can they permit ethnic or *caste difference* to detract from their fundamental charge to spread the Gospel.... Personal differences or accidents of birth must never undermine this essential role.¹³

Besides some bishops, many priests and deacons are infected with the viruses of caste, hierarchism and clericalism. For example, talking to my students of theology on the eve of their diaconal ordination, I was explaining the meaning of the diaconate and the call to service. I said, "A good deacon is one who habitually bends down to wash the feet of his people." Displeased with my explanation, a to-be deacon asked me pointedly: "Doesn't the diaconate ordination take us *up* in the hierarchy rather than *down* as you suggest?" Surprised, I said, "Look at Pope Francis and you'll understand. He sets us an example by washing the feet not only of men, but also of women of other religious traditions."

3.2. Lack of Apostolic and Pastoral Planning in Most Dioceses

The Code of Canon Law stipulates very clear rules and guidelines for the establishment of the council of priests and the college of

¹³ Text available on http://w2.vatican.va/content/john-paul-ii/en/speeches/2003/november/documents/hf_jp-ii_spe_20031117_ad-limina-india.html. Quote from n.4, italics added.

consultors.¹⁴ However, there are many dioceses where such councils are non-existent or exist merely on paper. Given this lack of consultative councils and synodal structures, bishops take decisions without consulting others. Consequently, since priests and lay co-workers feel that they are not trusted and their opinions not valued, they refuse to cooperate with diocesan projects. Hence, everyone goes one's own way without much concern for the common good.

Another lacuna in our apostolic planning is its myopic outreach. Most bishops and priests view church involvement merely as 'religious activity' forgetting that in India one can never categorize any issue as 'only secular' or 'purely sacred'. Lack of a broad, integral vision in planning adversely affects our Dalit and adivasi communities which are most disadvantaged.¹⁵ Their needs, problems and integral welfare are rarely discussed. Moreover, even when such issues are discussed, are the stakeholders really consulted? However, it is heartening to note that after much deliberation and consultation, the CBCI has recently drawn up a 'Policy of Dalit Empowerment' in December 2016.¹⁶

3.3. *Burdens of an Overly Institutionalised Church*

A glaring incongruity that people of other faiths see with Indian Christianity is that, on the one hand, it claims minority rights; while, on the other, it resembles a mighty empire with imposing institutions: colleges, schools, hospitals and social centres. While granting that some good is done by these institutions, questions also arise: Do these institutions truly serve the neediest? Who decides to build these institutions, and for whose benefit? Don't these institutions depend on

¹⁴ See the Code of Canon Law, nn.495-502.

¹⁵ See Nandi Joseph, *Dalit Reality of the Indian Catholic Church*, Chennai, Foundation for Dalit Literature, 2001.

¹⁶ This 'Policy of Dalit Empowerment in the Catholic Church in India: An Ethical Imperative to Build Inclusive Communities' was promulgated on December 13, 2016.

foreign funds, thereby making us dependent on the West?¹⁷ Who are these institutions accountable to? Experience indicates that such institutions give little room for corporate planning, co-responsibility in management, auditing and transparency. Many institutions are run by a few religious or diocesan clergy but with hardly any participation from anyone else - at least not in the planning, decision-making, budget allocation and accounting.

Institutionalization eclipses the human 'faces' of Christianity with buildings and finances. Those who manage institutions often lose touch with harsh realities that people endure: poverty, hunger, disease, corruption, exploitation and ecological calamities. Moreover, institutional modes of functioning expose the gross mismatch between what the church professes to be and preaches, i.e., a poor church, servant church, etc., and what it actually is in practice: a rich, comfort-seeking, elitist community serving mammon, not Christ.

3.4. Inadequate Training and Opportunities for the Lay Faithful

Some years ago I conducted a nationwide survey among competent lay faithful who held important positions at the diocesan or national levels.¹⁸ Two questions pertained to power and responsibility. The consensus seemed to be: responsibility, yes; power, no! The clergy were ready to assign responsibilities to the laity, but for power sharing, most seemed unwilling. The 'pray, pay, obey' axiom for the laity seems apt even today. An excuse often given to keep the lay faithful out of decision-making is that they do not have sufficient training. If this is true, then, while we spend so much of time and money to train candidates for priesthood, why are we reluctant to train promising lay faithful to be leaders in the church?

¹⁷ See Philip Muthukulam, "A Church of Interdependence," in *Church in the Third Millennium: Challenges and Prospects*, ed. J. Eruppakkatt, Mumbai, St Pauls, 2000, p.90.

¹⁸ The results of the survey were incorporated into an article: "*Magis Meeting Margins: Reconstructing Jesuit-Lay Collaboration*," in *For Others, With Others*, ed. M. Amaladoss, Anand, GSP, 2007, pp.203-226.

The laity has been described as a 'sleeping giant' in the church. If this giant is awake and active, what power can be unleashed! Yet, is it possible that the clergy often wish that the giant remains asleep so that no one questions their *modus operandi*? While the excuse of lack of training is used to keep the laity away from influential positions in church, do the same lay faithful not occupy some of the highest positions in public life?

Finally, the role of women and the space given them in church requires our attention.¹⁹ There is a tendency to belittle women and consider them not as competent as menfolk. Their opinions are rarely valued and they are often assigned subordinate tasks in keeping with hackneyed stereotypes that women cannot lead but must be led, should not speak loudly but submit humbly, etc.

3.5. Failure to read the 'signs of the times' and the 'signs of place'

When VC II exhorted Christians to read the 'signs of the times' nobody imagined that our world would change so drastically. Today, the progress of science and the InfoTech revolution make us all neighbours in a 'global village' with immense information available at our fingertips. Besides reading the 'signs of the times' there's need to decipher the 'signs of place', meaning, due to communication expansions and global contractions we do not need to do everything by ourselves.

Religion, like other subsystems in society today, has numerous resources at its command. There are many possibilities of networking, collaboration with others, and outsourcing of work to others who are better equipped than us. Why then should anyone struggle to be a know-all, do-all and be-all? The skills and competences of the church hierarchy are limited. Hence, there is need to seek advice and help from others who are more trained and competent to respond to the crying needs of the 'least' of Jesus' sisters and brothers.

¹⁹ See the articles in CBCI's Commission for Women's publication entitled *In Search of Space*, 2008.

4. Towards Fostering Greater Synodality in the Church

Given the above challenges to a synodal way of working in the church, we briefly note some possibilities to increase the participation of all the members of Christ's flock.

4.1. *Call for Conversion, Renewal and Change of Heart*

Our Church is always an *ecclesia semper reformanda*: "She has to keep adopting new forms, new embodiments. She has to keep giving herself a new form, a new shape in history; she is never simply finished and complete."²⁰ As the Church's mission unfolds in time, a change of heart and mindset must renew the whole ecclesial hierarchy and permeate all of church life. Pope Francis humbly speaks of the need of "a conversion of the papacy".²¹ If more bishops strove for "conversion of the episcopacy" things would change and more people would be active in church life and mission.

While bishops ought to realize their call to love and serve God's people, the laity too must hold their pastors accountable for *who* they are and *what* they do. Even at the risk of being sidelined, the laity must point out to the clergy their faults and failings. This calls for conversion in the laity, too. Pope Francis's caution - "Ensuring the synodality of the whole church will be impossible if people misunderstand the church's hierarchy and see it as a structure in which some people are placed above others"²² - is for every Christian. Nobody is exempt from constantly seeking conversion and renewal.

²⁰ Hans Küng, *The Council, Reform and Reunion*, New York, Sheed & Ward, 1961; reprinted 2015, p.36.

²¹ Address at the 50th Anniversary of the Institution of the Synod of Bishops, *ibid*.

²² See Cindy Wooden, "Pope calls for 'synodal' church where all listen, learn, share mission," in *Catholic News Service*, October 19, 2015, at <http://www.catholicnews.com/services/englishnews/2015/pope-calls-for-synodal-church-where-all-listen-learn-share-mission.cfm>. Accessed on May 25, 2017.

4.2. *Warding off Dangers of Clericalism, Hindutva and Romanization*

Most hegemonic ideologies premised on a 'holier than thou' platform impose a constricted, homogenous worldview upon others. This is seen when one group dominates over others within a religious tradition (clericalism) or one fanatic religious ideology steamrolls over other religions (Hindutva) or a specific religio-cultural expression lords over others (Romanization). Such ideologies draw strength by exhibiting their superiority through subtly using sacred texts and symbols to establish their antiquity, vigour and imagined timeless value. Such ideologies must be critiqued.

Pope Francis stoutly stands against all forms of clericalism. To the President of the Pontifical Commission for Latin America, he writes:

We cannot reflect on the theme of the laity while ignoring one of the greatest deformations that Latin America must face - clericalism. Clericalism leads to a homogenisation of the laity; treating it as an 'emissary' limits the various initiatives and efforts and, I dare say, the boldness necessary to be able to bring the Good News of the Gospel to all areas of social and above all political activity. Clericalism, far from inspiring various contributions and proposals, gradually extinguishes the prophetic flame of which the entire Church is called to bear witness in the heart of her peoples.²³

Similarly, resistance and protest against Hindutva must be waged in collaboration with all people of goodwill. Hindutva's promotion of 'unity in uniformity' and its subtle strategies of either 'assimilation' (of certain groups) and of 'annihilation' (of religious minorities) can be countered by propagating discourses of 'unity in diversity' and striving to build what can be seen as '*perichoretic communion*'²⁴ with all people of goodwill modeled upon the communion symbolized by the Trinity.²⁵

²³ See <http://press.vatican.va/content/salastampa/en/bollettino/pubblico/2016/04/26/160426a.pdf> for the text

²⁴ See R. Sahayadhas, *Hindu Nationalism and the Indian Church: Towards an Ecclesiology in Conversation with Martin Luther*, New Delhi, Christian World Imprints, 2013, pp.391-394, for details.

²⁵ See my *God of Our Soil: Towards Subaltern Trinitarian Theology*, Delhi,

Likewise, in the Catholic Church, there are traces of *Romanization* and *Latinization* with Vatican dicasteries sometimes suspecting and suppressing attempts at inculturation, indigenization and interculturalization, while foisting a uniform agenda in matters of church life and sacramental practice. Without granting legitimate autonomy to local churches, the catholicity of the Church is compromised by Roman centralism.²⁶

4.3. Accompaniment, Encouragement and Empowerment of the Lay Faithful

In discussions on new evangelization, new way of being church, church of the future, etc., the role of the laity always arises since without it there is no church at all. There is great need to accompany, encourage and empower the laity. First, we should foster ‘communion models’ of church rather than ‘hierarchical models’; and, if we refer to VC II’s ‘hierarchical communion’, then, we must view the presbyteral council and the college of consultors as Pope Francis does, namely, as “organs of communion” which, “only to the extent that these organizations keep connected to the ‘base’ and start from people and their daily problems, can a synodal Church begin to take shape.”²⁷ This requires accompaniment of our people in the ups and downs of their lives.

Second, accompaniment entails encouragement and empowerment of the laity. Delinking of the ministerial functions of the clergy from the administrative tasks of the church will help in creating participative structures. Diocesan pastoral and parish councils should be entrusted with decision-making in specific areas and financial administration could be given to respective financial councils.²⁸ Third, church movements

ISPCK, 2010, pp.66-71,253-257, which follows a similar line of argumentation.

²⁶ See Kurien Kunnumpuram, *The Indian Church of the Future*, Mumbai, St Pauls, 2007, pp.33-43.

²⁷ Address at the 50th Anniversary of the Institution of the Synod of Bishops, *ibid*.

²⁸ See “Laity in the Church: Identity and Mission in India Today,” The Indian Theologians Association (ITA) 2006 Statement, nn.55-56, in *Theologizing in the Indian Context: Statements of the Indian Theological Association*, ed. J. Parappally, Bengaluru, ATC, 2017, pp.129-130.

where the laity are actively involved - like the SCCs (Small Christian Communities) - should be fostered. The SCCs, wherein organization, scripture reading, prayer and outreach are carried out exclusively by the laity, have met with much success.²⁹ Finally, the empowerment of women must be fostered.³⁰

4.4. Towards Co-Responsible, Participatory and Prophetic Communion

Pope Emeritus Benedict XVI desired that the laity be given more responsibility in the church. At his Address at the Opening of the Pastoral Convention of the Diocese of Rome on the theme 'Church Membership and Pastoral Co-responsibility', he said that the church requires: "a change in mindset, particularly concerning lay people. They must no longer be viewed as 'collaborators' of the clergy but truly recognized as 'co-responsible', for the Church's being and action, thereby fostering the consolidation of a mature and committed laity."³¹ This will demand that there is transparency and people are well informed on what is going on in the church and in the world.

Due to the democratization of religion seen nationwide, when people are trusted and feel co-responsible for everyone and everything else, their participation is promoted. Moreover, they also feel committed to the common good. Here, the clergy could ensure that papal directives are followed up. This does not always happen. For instance, when Pope Francis wanted as many families as possible, worldwide, to respond to the 'survey' questionnaire distributed through the dioceses, the response was lukewarm.³² Hence, not many opinions of the laity were voiced.

²⁹ See Thomas Vijay, ed., *Findings of a Survey of SCCs in India*, Nagpur, Pallottine Animation Centre, 2010, for useful data in this regard.

³⁰ Lilly Francis & Loy George, *Empowerment of Women and Church in India*, Delhi, CBCI Commission for Women, 2009, provide an overview of the situation of women and suggest measures for empowerment.

³¹ Text available on https://w2.vatican.va/content/benedict-xvi/en/speeches/2009/may/documents/hf_ben-xvi_spe_20090526_convegno-diocesi-rm.html.

³² A survey by the E-VAAC (Evangelizing for a more Vibrant, Alert and Alive

In India, where religion and politics are inseparable, the Church must engage itself effectively in civil society.³³ This will demand bold initiatives in many ways. First, the Church's institutionalized way of functioning must be contested at all levels, and, if need be, there should be a moratorium on building new institutions. Second, in the face of burning intra-ecclesial and national problems, there is need to analyze root causes of crises, fix policies, develop structures and devise strategies for action. Third, with limited economic, numerical and personnel resources, there is also need to prioritize issues. This requires collaboration and networking with others, even beyond the confines of church.

As church of 'prophetic participation'³⁴ in favour of the 'least' in society, we must not lose our faith-perspective and commitment to love and serve. Pope Francis writes:

We need to keep hope and faith alive in a world full of contradictions, especially for the poorest, and especially with the poorest. It means, as pastors, working in the midst of our people and, with our people, supporting faith and its hope. We need to look at our cities - and therefore all the spaces where our people live their lives - with a contemplative gaze, a gaze of faith which sees God dwelling in their homes, in their streets and squares.³⁵

5. Conclusion:

Many Miles to go for Substantial Synodal Success

Quoting St John Chrysostom Pope Francis reminds us that 'Church and Synod are synonymous'. No Synod, no Church! He adds:

Church) group estimated that only 50% of bishops, worldwide, and 73% of the Indian bishops responded to the call of Pope Francis to seek opinions during the 'Synod for the Family'.

³³ See Antony Kalliath & Francis Gonsalves, eds., *Church's Engagement in Civil Society*, Bangalore, ATC & ITA, 2009, for articles in this regard.

³⁴ See Viju Wilson, *Ecclesiology of Prophetic Participation*, Delhi, ISPCK, 2012, 83-94.

³⁵ *Letter to the President of the Pontifical Commission for Latin America*, ibid.

Inasmuch as the Church is nothing other than the ‘journeying together’ of God’s flock along the paths of history towards the encounter with Christ the Lord, then we understand too that, within the Church, no one can be ‘raised up’ higher than others. On the contrary, in the Church, it is necessary that each person ‘lower’ himself or herself, so as to serve our brothers and sisters along the way.³⁶

We are all called to inculcate a spirit of self-emptying, service and sacrifice. Synodality begins from the grassroots, first and foremost, by listening to the varied voices of Christ’s faithful. These voices must be listened to with respect and then discussed in presbyteral councils and conferences of bishops in various regions. Finally, at the universal level, collegiality gets consolidated with the Pope. It is providential that Pope Francis has been appointing cardinal consultors from every corner of the world. He says, “It is not advisable for the Pope to take the place of local Bishops in the discernment of every issue which arises in their territory.... I am conscious of the need to promote a sound ‘decentralization’.” These are not only words but concretized in his works and witness.

Mindful of being a minuscule ‘minority’ in this massive mass of a billion-plus Indians, we take to heart Pope Francis’s exhortation:

Our gaze also extends to humanity as a whole. ... As a Church which ‘journeys together’ with men and women, sharing the travails of history, let us cherish the dream that a rediscovery of the inviolable dignity of peoples and of the function of authority as service will also be able to help civil society to be built up in justice and fraternity, and thus bring about a more beautiful and humane world for coming generations.³⁷

May God’s Spirit continue to guide and strengthen us on our pilgrim path!

³⁶. Address of Pope Francis on the 50th Anniversary of the Institution of the Synod of Bishops at the Vatican on October 17, 2015.

³⁷. Ibid

Synodal Church from a Historical Perspective

Francis Thonippara

The present article is an attempt to highlight the synodal or participative character of the Church founded by Jesus Christ. Synodality has always permeated all the basic dimensions of Church life. The Church is by nature synodal because it is the Body of Christ and the communion of the Holy Spirit, which constitutes the entire institution of the Church. The synods reflect the contemporary state of the Church's self-understanding. The conciliar character of the Church had been suspected, especially from the beginning of the Second Millennium, on the ground that councils and synods had been seen as rivals to papal primacy, papal authority and Roman centralisation. The Second Vatican Council's understanding of the Church as the "Body of Christ" is complemented with that of the "People of God". For Pope Francis synod is the journeying together of laity, pastors and the bishop of Rome. The synodal Church is a Church which listens, which realizes that listening is more than simply hearing (Rev.2:7). It is a reciprocal listening in which each one has something to learn.

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Introduction

The Synodal nature of the Church or the synodality has always permeated all the basic dimensions of Church life, from its local to its universal expression. Synods or Councils are an important means of maintaining and promoting ecclesiastical unity and deciding questions of faith and discipline. The essence of Christian religion is communion. Since the Church is a communion of the faithful, worthy and elected members of the Church used to gather as a group or community possessing authority, to consult and make decisions after due

deliberations guided by the Holy Spirit for the protection of faith and morals and for the growth and unity of the Church. The conciliar nature of the Church is the basis for the frequent Synods and Councils. The regional or provincial synods of the early Church were clear manifestations of the conciliar or consultative character of the Church founded by Christ. This synodal character which was inherent in the Church of the first Millennium had been lost or ignored during the second Millennium, which however had been re-introduced to a greater extent with the Second Vatican Council.

Historical Background

In his letter to the Church in Corinth (1 Cori.11) St Paul identifies the Church with “gathering in one place” in order to celebrate the Eucharist. Again, as the Body of Christ, the Church is at once “the communion of the Holy Spirit” (2 Cori. 13, 13) and “the fullness of him who fulfils all in all” (Eph.1.23). No one is saved alone but only as a member of the body of the Church, in organic unity and communion with others. It is on this basis that the synodality of the Church is founded. The Church is by nature synodal because it is the Body of Christ and the communion of the Holy Spirit, which constitutes the entire institution of the Church.

The holy fathers, who have gathered at intervals in the four holy councils, have followed the examples of antiquity. They dealt with heresies and current problems by debate in common, since it was established as certain that when the disputed question is set out by each side in communal discussions, the light of truth drives out the shadows of lying. The truth cannot be made clear in any other way when there are debates about questions of faith, since everyone requires the assistance of his neighbour. As Solomon says in his Proverbs: “A brother who helps a brother shall be exalted like a strong city; he shall be as strong as a well established kingdom”(Proverbs 18:19). Again in Ecclesiastes he says: “Two are better than one, for they have a good reward for their toil”(Ecclesiastes 4:9). And the Lord himself says: “Amen I say to you, if two of you agree on earth about anything they ask, it will be done for them by my Father in heaven. For where two or three

are gathered in my name, there am I in the midst of them” (Matthew 18:19). Thus spoke the Christians gathered for the fifth council of the whole Church, the Second Council of Constantinople in 553.¹

From the above testimony of the fathers of the Second Council of Constantinople one could easily gather the mind of the leaders of the early Church in convening synods and councils. The so-called Apostolic Council of Jerusalem (Acts 15; Gal. 2, 1 -10) which shows points of contact with the Jewish Synedrium or Sanhedrin (Dt, 17. 8 -13) is regarded as the New Testament prototype of Councils. Synod is the fruitful expression and instrument of the collegiality of the bishops. The synodal principle can be traced to the early days of the Church when synods were called to examine and discuss serious problems. Synod is derived from two Greek words, *Syn* - meaning together and *hodos* signifies road, way, meaning walking or journeying together. *Synodos* is a feminine noun. The Latin *Synodus* too is feminine, but *Concilium* is neuter². *Synodos* originally was used for any assembly, whether secular or religious. Only later it was restricted largely to Church assemblies or councils.

Tertullian was the first one to use *Concilium* in the ecclesiastical sense. *Synodos*, assembly, meeting for discussion and deliberation was first used in the Apostolic Constitutions. The effect of the synodical system tended to consolidation. The original Christian communities, which were independent communities of the faithful, had regular assemblies of spiritual fellowship. Gradually these assemblies became a powerful confederation, a compact moral commonwealth within the political organisation of the Roman Empire. The episcopate culminated in papal primacy and the synodal structure of the Church grew into ecumenical councils, which in the original sense represented the whole Church of the Roman Empire³. The words synod and council are

¹ Norman P. Tanner, *The Councils of the Church*, The Crossroad Publishing Company, New York, 2001, p. 1.

² Norman P. Tanner, *The Councils of the Church*, pp.2-3.

³ Philip Schaff, *History of the Christian Church*, Vol. II, Eerdmans Publishing Company, Michigan, Reprint 1989, p. 176.

interchangeable when they refer to the history of the first centuries of the Church. The ecumenical council derives its name from the Greek *oikoumene*, meaning the inhabited earth. The name was given in Greek and Roman times to the lands of the Mediterranean basin, the only countries in which civilised man was presumed to live. The ecumenical gatherings beginning with the Council of Nicaea in 325 are called councils.

The biblical basis for the collegiality is found in the understanding of the Church as the People of God (1 Peter 2) and about the Apostolic Council (Acts 15). The gatherings of bishops from a province or a region, as well as of the bishop and clergy of a diocese are usually referred to as synod. Synods of various kinds have been held throughout the entire history of the Church. The synods reflect the contemporary state of the Church's self-understanding and on the prevailing balance of power within the Church and in the political world. In all the churches of Christ, synods play an important role. In the Orthodox Church they are an essential element in the very constitution of the Church. In the Protestant churches synods provide a constitutional counterweight to the officials who govern the Church. The Catholic Church understands the synods as supplementary aids to the daily administration of the Church. In future the synods will have greater roles in the daily life of the Church as an attempt to provide wider opportunities to the laity to take active part in the life of the Church⁴.

The earliest recorded assembly was the Jerusalem Council as mentioned earlier. St Ignatius of Antioch spoke of the presbyters as the bishop's counsel. Since the second half of the second century, the bishops of a province assembled in synods to discuss important issues. This practice began in Asia Minor about the time (ca170) the *Montanists* appeared and threatened the ecclesiastical unity and synods were soon held annually in Asia Minor⁵. Yearly synods were held in Cappadocia.

⁴ Handbook Catholic Theology, edited by Wolfgang Beinert and Francis Schuessler Fiorenza, Crossroad, New York, 1995, pp.681 – 682.

⁵ Cfr., Karl Bihlmeyer, Hermann Tuechle, *Church History*, Vol. I, *Christian Antiquity*, The Newman Press Westminster, 1968, pp. 112, 324, 325.

At the beginning of the third century a synod in Greece decided the canon of the Scriptures. The orthodox teaching of Origen was discussed in Alexandria and in Rome in 231 or 232. In 220 Pope Callistus I ruled that only a group of bishops could depose a bishop for grave reasons and this right seems to have been exercised thereafter in local synods. The absolution of *lapsi*, those who renounced the Christian faith for fear of persecution and later wanted to come back to the Church, and rebaptism were subjects of synods held in Africa and in Rome. These instances of frequent gatherings of bishops in synod indicate that in the mid third century, in almost all the ecclesiastical provinces of the Church, frequent, if not yearly, synods were the rule. Synods proved an important means for preserving and strengthening the unity of the Church. Provincial synods of the early churches were well known and the conciliar and synodal activities in the Church were very active in the first five centuries. Thus, *Synodos*, a synonym for Council, means secondarily an assembly of the regional churches who exercise their ministry of governance collegially (Synod of bishops, Episcopal Conferences) or the designated members of a local church under the leadership of the bishop⁶. The synods or councils were arenas of heated discussions and the consensus that emerged did come after serious discussions and debates.

By the fourth century, especially after the Edict of Milan, we observe remarkable growth of the structure of the Church. The Council of Nicaea I, (325) pre-supposed that the bishops of each civil province, diocese in the West and eparchy in the East, would be assembled together in synods for the regulation of matters of common interest. Council of Nicaea Canon 5 and Council of Chalcedon Canon 19 prescribed that the synods be held twice a year. The Council also accorded to the bishop of each provincial capital (metropolitan) special status and powers as the convener and president of provincial synods. Except in Egypt this provincial system of church administration got established in the whole East. Above the provincial or regional level, the patriarchal sees and ecumenical councils came to exist.

⁶ Cfr., *Handbook of Catholic Theology*, p. 681.

Provincial Synods became important institutions for systematizing and consolidating ecclesiastical law. The Synod of Orleans in 533, Canon 2 and other Councils of the sixth century prescribed that they be held at least once a year. Several provincial synods of the West during the sixth and seventh centuries advised the holding of diocesan synods once a year. The frequency of the synods even in the Roman Church was unparalleled as we notice there were more than fourteen synods for various reasons held at Rome till 610. Patriarchal, Provincial, Diocesan synods were assemblies of bishops or priests of such ecclesiastical divisions under the presidency of the respective ecclesiastical head. These instances of frequent gathering of bishops in Synod indicate that in the early Church frequent synods were the rule.

It is interesting to note a special type of synod called *Endemusa*, which was very popular in the government of the Greek Church in the fifth century. The Patriarch of Constantinople convened the meeting of the bishops who happened to be in Constantinople and he held discussions with them and sought their advice on important matters which the Patriarch thought was worth consulting. Later, a number of bishops took up residence in the city of Constantinople so that the *Endemusa* synod might meet whenever the Patriarch desired⁷.

By the Council of Chalcedon in 451 the number of Patriarchal sees had been fixed as five - Rome, Constantinople, Alexandria, Antioch and Jerusalem. Jerusalem as the mother of all churches has only an honorary title. This system of Church administration, popularly known as *Pentarchy*, - Rome, Constantinople, Alexandria, Antioch and Jerusalem - was an organic evolution of the consultative or synodal nature of the early church administration. The system of five patriarchates, however, provided no single central authority for the Church as a whole. Canon 3 of the Council of Constantinople and Canon 28 of the Council of Chalcedon clearly speak about the privileged position of Constantinople, next to Rome. The Church politics, feuds and rivalry began with the claim of Constantinople as next to Rome,

⁷ Cfr., Karl Bihlmeyer, Church History, p. 325.

which until then was Alexandria. After 381 these principal sees were continually engaged in open or concealed disputes over their relative prestige and authority.

In the Catholic tradition there are twenty one Councils, the first eight are called Eastern or imperial or ancient Councils. From Lateran I in 1123 till Lateran V in 1512 - 1517 there are ten Councils, which are popularly known as Medieval Councils or Papal Councils. Trent, Vatican I and Vatican II are called modern Councils. Even in Catholic circles discussions are going on regarding the ecumenical character of the Medieval Councils. So Medieval and Modern Councils are also known as General Councils. The Greek Orthodox Church accepts only the first seven councils as ecumenical councils.

The ecumenical councils convened by the emperors were the central authority of the Church, although primacy of honour was accorded to the Pope of Rome. The idea of a state Church since the time of Constantine the Great sanctioned the emperor to summon a council. The synods themselves and the popes conceded this right. The first eight ecumenical councils were convened by the secular power and were conducted in the Eastern part of the Empire. In the West the imperial authority was gradually eclipsed after Justinian in 565 and slowly the self-awareness and identity of the Western Christianity came to depend on the leadership and the symbolic role of the Roman Pontiff⁸. The change of political scenario in the West with the alliance of papacy with the Frankish kingdom, the Carolingians, and with the establishment of the Papal State in 754 and the inauguration of the Holy Roman Empire of the German Nations with the crowning of Charles the Great in 800 by Pope Leo III, gave a new identity to the Western Christians, which also indirectly caused the distancing of the Eastern Church from the Roman Church. Although there were powerful Popes, the special political situation made the Popes to allow Charles the Great to have upper hand in Church matters and even synods were convened by the Emperor and decrees were implemented by the imperial orders.

⁸ Cfr., Williston Walker, *A History of the Christian Church*, T&T. Clark Ltd, Scotland, 1997, pp. 185 – 186.

The Schism of 1054 and the Protestant Reformation and other divisions in the Church happened mainly because the synodal or conciliar character of the Church was lost. "Despite all the politicking and evidence of human nature that may be found in the early councils, they represent a miracle of human endeavour and above all a miracle of divine grace"⁹. The conciliar or consultative character of the Church had been suspected, especially from the beginning of the Second Millennium, on the ground that councils and synods had been seen as rivals to papal primacy, papal authority and Roman centralisation. The Roman centralisation began in a more focussed way with the Gregorian Reformation under the charismatic, daring and dynamic leadership of Pope Gregory VII (1073 -1085) who exalted papal authority as the supreme authority over all other sources of authority.

Roman Centralisation

There are many factors which led to the Roman centralisation. After the dark age of papacy, when the Church was under the clutches of the feudal lords, reform attempts had been made from the part of the Popes. New theories had been developed and papacy was exalted. From eleventh century on the very name Papa received the distinctive meaning and according to some sources the canonically elected Pope was indubitably sanctified by the merits of St Peter. The Pope started wearing *tiara* as a symbol of his supreme power. The traditional belief was that the Roman Pontiff possessed decisive teaching authority for the entire Church and that in matters of faith he never erred. This belief got strengthened in due course of time. St Thomas Aquinas declared that the official teaching of the Vicar of Christ is infallible. The First Vatican Council defined the infallibility of the Pope. Pope Alexander III (1170) reserved the canonisation of the saints to Pope and the fourth Lateran Council of 1215 decreed that only Pope could approve new relics. A catalogue of papal censures was drawn up and new censures were added and to absolve from sins reserved to the Pope a special Roman court was established. Councils were formerly convened and enforced by the emperors. But now they were summoned

⁹ Norman Tanner, *Was the Church too Democratic ?* Dharmaram Publications, 2003, p. 4.

and sanctioned exclusively by the Pope beginning with the Council of Lateran I in 1123. To facilitate the central administration of the Church, more officials were appointed and central administration of the Church came to be known as Roman Curia. The cardinals were made the immediate assistants of the popes and the College of Cardinals became a decisive force in the daily administration of the Church. During the time of Pope Nicholas II (1059 -1061) the Lateran Synod of April 1059 decreed that only cardinals have a voice in the election of the Pope, with cardinal - bishops exercising the right to propose the candidate. The Cardinals' exclusive right of electing the Pope was exercised with the election of Pope Alexander II (1061-1073). During the time of Pope Gregory VII (1073-1085) papal legates were chosen and sent to enforce reforms in the distant places or to negotiate with princes concerning ecclesiastical interests. We see the climax of papal power and Roman centralisation during the reigns of Pope Innocent III (1198-1216) and Boniface VIII (1294-1303). The consolidation of the central administration of the Church took a definite shape during the Avignon papacy (1305 - 1377).

Many rights formerly exercised by archbishops and provincial synods were now reserved only to the Pope. Up to this time it was the rule that the archbishop investigates and confirms the election of his suffragan bishops. But from the fourteenth century the confirmation of an election was frequently given by the Pope. Since the ninth century archbishops were obliged to ask for *pallium* within three months after consecration; but from about the middle of the eleventh century they were required to obtain it personally in Rome. Taking oath of obedience to the Pope by the metropolitans became a general practice from the eleventh century. During the twelfth century appeals to Rome became as frequent as to give rise to all sorts of abuses.

The increase in the personnel of the Curia necessitated increased revenue. Revenues of the Papal States, feudal taxes, taxes from monasteries, Peter's pence, *pallium* tax, etc. were the main sources of income. With the increase and centralisation of ecclesiastical power, the need was felt for a wider expansion of canon law and a more authentic codification. Around 1142 Gratian published the new code of

canon law called *Decretum Gratiani*¹⁰. Due to the extreme centralisation, the rich diversity of the local churches and their legitimate autonomy were lost¹¹.

The Western Schism(1378 -1417) confused the ordinary faithful the then existing belief of papal primacy and papal infallibility. The wide spread of the theory of conciliarism started questioning the Roman centralisation. Added to that the Humanists exposed the abuses in the Roman Curia that speeded up the Protestant Reformation. The forerunners of Protestant Reformation like John Wycliffe and John Huss questioned the papal primacy. Protestant Reformation was a radical reaction against Roman centralisation and corrupt practices in the Roman Curia. The demand of Martin Luther for a reform Council was not properly attended to as the popes were busy with many other secular matters. If a reform council had been held, the Protestant Reform would have been avoided.

Council of Trent (1545 -1563)

As everyone knows, the immediate historical context of the convocation of the Council of Trent was the Protestant Reformation. As a means of reform of the Church, the Council strongly recommended the convocation of the Provincial Synods once in three years and the Diocesan Synods to be celebrated annually¹².The Council of Trent was the Catholic response to the Protestant Reformation. Care of the souls and the pastoral care through Diocesan and regional Synods were the major concrete suggestions to respond to the Protestant Reformation and to revive the Catholic life in Europe. In the twenty-fourth Session of the Council of Trent, which was held on 11 November 1563, the main topic of discussion was the reform of the Church. The ecclesiastical authorities took keen interest in implementing the decrees

¹⁰ Cfr., Bihlmeyer – Tuechle, *Church History*, Vol. II, The Newman Press, Westminster, 1967, pp. 194 – 200.

¹¹ Kuncheria Pathil, *Theology of the Church: New Horizons*, Dharmaram Publications, Bangalore, 2006, p. 28.

¹² Schroeder, H.J., *The Canons and Decrees of the Council of Trent*, Tan Books and Publishers, Inc. Rockford, USA, 1978, pp. 192-193.

of the Council through the convocation of the regional Synods and councils like the Synod of Udayamperur in 1599, the Synod of Brest in 1596, various Goan Councils, etc.

First Vatican Council

Pope Pius IX convened the First Vatican Council (1869-1870) for the purpose of defining the infallibility and primacy of the Pope. The immediate historical context includes the French Revolution in 1789, the Industrial Revolution, the Enlightenment and the social teachings of Karl Marx and Engels. The second Decree of the First Vatican Council “Constitution on the Church of Christ” deals with papal infallibility. The primacy of the Pope included an “infallible teaching authority”. This definition added more strength to the monarchical structure of the Church. Vatican I “made claims that many find impossible to accept and that may appear to show the Catholic Church at its most aggressive and authoritarian”¹³. The doctrine of Papal Primacy of Vatican I has been today complemented by the Second Vatican Council’s teaching of the doctrine of the Collegiality of the Bishops.

Second Vatican Council

With the Second Vatican Council there was a new paradigm for the theology of the Church. In the background of the Lutheran idea of invisible Church, Robert Bellarmine in the teachings of the Council of Trent placed great stress on Church’s institutional character. Pope Pius XII’s Encyclical on the Mystical Body of Christ (1943) made a great step forward from that earlier position. The Second Vatican Council’s understanding of the Church as the “Body of Christ” is complemented with that of the “People of God”¹⁴. The Council had made the following major changes or shifts of emphasis in the understanding of the Church: from Institution to Mystery; from Hierarchy to People; from Papal Primacy to Episcopal Collegiality; from Universal Church to Local Churches; from Triumphant Church to Pilgrim Church; from One

¹³ Norman P. Tanner, *The Councils of the Church*, p. 96.

¹⁴ Joseph Ratzinger, *Theological Highlights of Vatican II*, Paulist Press, New York, 2009, pp. 73-74.

Catholic Church to many Christian Churches; from Ecclesiocentrism to the World and the Kingdom of God¹⁵. This new understanding of the Church resulted in the establishment of the Synod of bishops.

The Synod of bishops is a permanent institution established by Pope Paul VI on 15 September 1965 in response to the desire of the Fathers of the Second Vatican Council to keep alive the spirit of collegiality engendered by the conciliar experience. Even before the Second Vatican Council the idea was growing for a structure which might provide the bishops with the means to assist the Pope in his governing of the universal Church. The Synod of Bishops is also a magnificent confirmation of the Church's reality in which the Episcopal college, "in so far as it is composed of many, expresses the variety and universality of the People of God, but in so far as it is assembled under one head, it expresses the unity of the flock of Christ" (*Lumen Gentium*, 22). In the Decree on the Pastoral Office of Bishops in the Church, *Christus Dominus*, No. 5 we have the explicit reference to the Synod of bishops. "Bishops chosen from different parts of the world, in accordance with methods and procedures already established or to be by the Roman Pontiff, will give more effective and helpful service to the supreme pastor of the church by meeting in a council which shall be called the *Synod of bishops*"¹⁶. The purpose of the Synod is "to foster closer unity between the Roman Pontiff and the bishops, to assist the Roman Pontiff with their counsel in safeguarding and increasing faith and morals and in preserving and strengthening ecclesiastical discipline, and to consider questions concerning the Church's activity in the world" (The Code of Canon Law, canon 342).

There are Ordinary General Assemblies, Extraordinary General Assemblies and Special Assemblies. The first Ordinary General Assembly of the Synod of Bishops was held from 29 September to 29 October 1967. A number of Special Assemblies was held mainly focussing certain geographical territories, for example, special Assembly

¹⁵ Kuncheria Pathil, *Theology of the Church: New Horizons*, p. 33.

¹⁶ Norman P. Tanner, Editor, *Decrees of the Ecumenical Councils, Vol. II*, Sheed and Ward, London 1990, p. 922

for Europe, Special Assembly for Asia, Special Assembly for Africa, etc. As a follow up of the implementation of the synodal functioning of the Church various collegial groups of Episcopates on all continents were formed: The Latin American Episcopal Conference (C.E.L.Am), the Council of European Episcopal Conferences (C.C.E.E.), the Symposium of Episcopal Conferences of Africa and Madagascar (S.E.C.A.M) and the Federation of Asian Bishops' Conferences (F.A.B.C.). The Synod movement has widely expanded in the Church and holding of Diocesan, Provincial or National or Continental Synods are now a regular feature of the daily life of the Church.

Pope Francis and the Synodal Church

As the Ordinary General Assembly of the Synod was in full session, on 17 October 2015 Pope Francis made an address to commemorate the 50th anniversary of the institution of the Synod of bishops, in Paul VI Audience Hall¹⁷. For him synod is the journeying together of laity, pastors and the bishop of Rome. The Synodal Church is a Church which listens, which realizes that listening is more than simply hearing (Rev.2:7). It is a reciprocal listening in which each one has something to learn. It would be a Church where everyone would listen to everyone. Quoting Saint John Chrysostom Pope says that Church and Synod are synonymous in as much as the Church is nothing more than the journeying together of God's flock along the paths of history towards the encounter with Christ the Lord.

The first level of the exercise of synodality is of the particular Churches with Diocesan Synod. The second level is that of the Ecclesiastical Provinces and Ecclesiastical Regions and the last level is that of the universal Church. The Synod of Bishops representing the Catholic episcopate, becomes an expression of Episcopal collegiality with an entirely synodal Church. According to Pope Francis, the Church's structure is like an upside down pyramid, with the top on the bottom, which is why the ordained are called ministers.

¹⁷ *Address of His Holiness Pope Francis*, Ceremony commemorating the 50th Anniversary of the Institution of the Synod of Bishops, Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 2015.

The commitment to build a synodal Church has significant ecumenical implications. "A careful examination of how, in the Church's life, the principle of synodality and the service of the one who presides are articulated, will make a significant contribution to the progress of relations between our Churches"¹⁸. A synodal Church is like a standard lifted up among the nations in a world which often consigns the fate of entire peoples to the grasp of small but powerful groups.

A synodal Church is a Church which takes all levels into account. The universal Church can only exist in cooperation with the local churches. There should be a networking of local churches cooperating with the universal Church. The future Church can only be a Church which combines unity and diversity on all levels.

St Thomas Christians

The synodal or participative nature of the universal Church had a varied expression in the daily church administration of the St Thomas Christians in India. Their administrative system, traditionally known as *Yogam*, is a three-tier institution. *Palliyogam* or parish *yogam* consisted of the priests and heads of the families which was presided over by the senior priest. The administration was in the hands of the stewards. Matters regarding several parishes of a region were handled in a regional *yogam* known as *Desiyayogam*. *Mahayogam* dealt with matters of the whole Thomas Christian community. A *Mahayogam* of the representatives of the seventy two parishes assembled at Angamaly in 1773 deputed *Malpan* Joseph Cariattil and *Cathanar* Thomas Paremmakkal to go to Rome and Lisbon in order to have the ecclesial unity restored by receiving Mar Dionysius I into the Catholic fold. The unifying factor of the *Mahayogam* was the Archdeacon of All India, whose office was unknown to us from the eighteenth century. The functioning of the three-tier system of church administration was highly democratic and some missionaries described the St Thomas Christian community as "Christian Republic".

¹⁸ Francis, Address to the Delegation of the Ecumenical Patriarchate of Constantinople, 27 June 2015.

After the establishment of the Syro-Malabar Church as a Major Archiepiscopal Church in 1993, the Synod of Bishops of this Church is ecclesiologically the highest representative body. In 1998 the erstwhile *Mahayogam* was restored and updated with the name Major Archiepiscopal Assembly (MAA). There is also a permanent Synod presided over by the Major Archbishop. The updated diocesan and parish level administrative units are also functioning. The Syro-Malankara Church was raised to a Major Archiepiscopal status in 2005 and the Holy Episcopal Synod is ecclesiologically the highest representative body. The Permanent Synod is headed by the Major Archbishop. The Syro-Malankara Catholic Church Assembly is a forum representing a cross section of the People of God of the Syro-Malankara Catholic Church, which is the updated erstwhile *Mahayogam*. With the Major Archiepiscopal status and the functioning of Synodal structure, the Syro-Malabar and the Syro-Malankara *sui iuris* Churches have lot of administrative freedom. In the election of the Major Archbishop, in the election of the bishops and in liturgical matters the Synod enjoys reasonable freedom of the early church.

Malankara Orthodox Syrian Church and Jacobite Syrian Orthodox Church have the three-tier *Yogam* that subsists in the parish council and the diocesan council. The Malankara Orthodox Syrian Church has the Malankara Syrian Christian Association (MSCA) which is the modern version of the *Mahayogam*. Jacobite Syrian Orthodox Church, which is hierarchically subject to the Syrian Orthodox Patriarchate of Antioch, has the traditional *Mahayogam* by name Jacobite Syrian Christian Association. In the Marthoma Church there is the *Pratinidhisabha*, which is the updated *Mahayogam*. Of course at the parish level there is Palliyogam called *itavakasamgham*¹⁹.

Indian Church Today

Catholic Church in India is a communion of three individual *sui iuris* churches, Syro-Malabar, Syro-Malankara and Latin. In the light of

¹⁹ In writing this section on *Yogam*, I am very much indebted to Rev. Dr. George Nedungatt, S.J. for his article *Yogam in A Concise Encyclopaedia of Christianity in India*, edited by Errol D'Lima, SJ., St. Pauls Mumbai, 2014, pp. 807-813.

the teachings of Second Vatican Council and in the spirit of the Latin and Oriental Codes of Canon Laws, separate Episcopal Conferences have been formed: Syro-Malabar Bishops' Conference, Syro-Malankara Bishops' Conference and Conference of Catholic Bishops of India (CCBI). The first two have the Major Archiepiscopal Curia having their headquarters in Mount St Thomas, Kakkanadu, Ernakulum, and Trivandrum respectively. CCBI has its Central Office in Bangalore. The Catholic Bishops Conference of India (CBCI) is the common platform of discussion for all the three individual churches.

Conclusion

The Catholic Church is in the process of reviving her synodal nature and after the Second Vatican Council, special efforts have been made to rediscover the collegiality and the participative character of the Church. The establishment of the Synod of Bishops even before the conclusion of the Second Vatican Council speaks volumes about the interest of the Catholic Church in going back to the synodal structure of the early Church. Synodality must once again become a structural practice in the Church, as the German bishops and theologians insist. There are great opportunities for the Church in a globalised world as long as it discards its centralist approach. Very often the Church is not taking seriously the societal change that is occurring after the Second Vatican Council. The Church should not stop with the Second Vatican Council since the Council gave the Church the gift of new departures which we can and we must take up in a new way today in the changing context of the globalised world.

Authority: A Guarantee of Unity and a Service in the Church

Henry Angel

The article deals with the exercise of authority in the Catholic Church by elaborating different dimensions of authority like goal, style and functions. The authority in the Catholic Church has to be exercised as powerless and service of others. Taking insights from the fourth commandment, the author explains the goal of authority as increase in life not only here on earth but also in alignment with the promises of God. The author explains two styles of authority taking lessons from the scripture: co-responsibility from Moses and service from Jesus. The functions of authority in the church is to be at the service of truth, diversity, communion and unity.

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Introduction

Authority in the Catholic Church is one of the most obvious things. Every Catholic experiences its impact in his/her daily life. Yet the meaning and exercise of authority is so complex that it eludes univocal expression. It is beyond the scope of this article and competence of its writer to go into the controversial issues related to the exercise of authority, like, apostolic succession, papal primacy, collegiality, conciliarism, infallibility, magisterium and morality, the possibility of dissent, ecumenical issues related to authority, etc. This article proposes to discuss the exercise of authority in the Catholic Church in a general way, point out its goal, style and some of its functions.

Authority in the Church

When we speak of authority in the Catholic Church we mean the exercise of at least three forms of power: i) Power of Orders which one receives through the reception of the Sacrament of Orders and which effectively enables one to act in the person of Christ when, for example, he confects the Eucharist or absolves a penitent. ii) Power of governance which involves ruling, governing, giving orders and having power over others. iii) The power to teach. Throughout church's history the exercise of these powers has been marred by number of controversies ranging from ordination of women, papal primacy and episcopal collegiality, infallibility, etc. The various positions taken on these issues result from different ways of resolving the tension that exists between the sacred and the secular.

Church is God's work and therefore she is partly a mystery. This is why *Lumen Gentium* begins its discussion on the Church in chapter 1 with the title: "The Mystery of the Church." This aspect of the Church is not to be fully comprehended with human reason but it is to be believed in. This is why in their profession of faith members of the Church confess, "I believe in the holy catholic Church." From this angle the Church is constantly guided by the Spirit and she has a spiritual and numinous quality about her. At the same time Church is also a human society evolving along with human history and is profoundly affected by it. In this sense the Church is visible, human and institutional. This is not to divide the Church into two: the visible Church and the invisible Church. Just as the human person is both spiritual and bodily and yet remains profoundly one so also in the Church the spiritual and socio-human aspects are at deep interplay even as she is one.

As a mystery, the Spirit of Jesus Christ leads the Church; as a socio-human reality the Church follows the spirit in visible form. In grasping the guidance of the Spirit at every epoch the Church is also profoundly influenced and limited by contemporary secular cultural, economic, political and social templates in vogue in different societies. In fact the Church's ministry after all is to grasp as fully as she can the trajectory of life shown by the Spirit in a given time and incarnate it in the form of teachings to guide the faithful and in the form of various services which

seek to transform the economics, politics, and culture of people. Grasping the guidance of the spirit and translating it for the world in visible form is never a task fully accomplished but a project in progress. So there is an eternal as well as a temporal and contingent aspect to the reality of the Church. What is eternal can never be reduced to the contingent. When that is done the voice of human beings can become the voice of God resulting in horrendous abuse of power in the Church. Secular interests tend to creep into the work of incarnating the guidance of the Spirit and authority of the Spirit may be claimed for what is purely human agendas. Just to cite two examples: Pope Leo X's condemnation of Martin Luther's claim, "That heretics be burned is against the will of the Spirit,"¹ and the IV Lateran Council's solemn endorsement of the notion of crusade against Islam and Christian heretics.² On hindsight we members of the Church encountering such episodes in the history of the Church we love stand and wonder, "Did the Holy Spirit really want the Church to burn heretics to preserve the purity of the faith or go to war with a people to impose our faith on them or are these events the result of historical compulsions and expression of human tendency to dominate others in order to put them in their place or get them to our side?"

The Lord's teaching rings loud and clear, "The kings of the Gentiles lord it over them and those in authority over them are addressed as 'Benefactors'; but among you it shall not be so. Rather, let the greatest among you be as the youngest, and the leader as the servant. For who is greater: the one seated at table or the one who serves? Is it not the one seated at table? I am among you as the one who serves" (Lk 22:25-27). Luke places this instruction of Jesus in the setting of the last supper highlighting its importance by making it a brief farewell discourse. With sharpness and clarity Jesus declares that in the community he was leaving behind power was not to be exercised as it was done in the secular world. There, power was used as a tool to

¹Pope Leo X, Papal Bull Condemning the Errors of Martin Luther *Exsurge Domine*, 15 June 1520, list of errors n. 33.

²Cf. Eamon Duffy, "Who Leads the Church," *Priests and People* 15 (November 2001): 400.

dominate, suppress and control. Jesus was not abolishing the differences that are bound to exist in a human community – between the greatest and the youngest, between the one who sits at table and the one who serves. The import of his statement is that all in the community must wear the attitude of a servant: “I am among you as the one who serves.” The Letter to the Ephesians, 5:21, captures that spirit even more graphically: “Be subordinate to one another out of reverence for Christ” and proposes that as an injunction for all in a Christian family before going on to elaborate various household duties of the different members.

In these and similar statements (e.g., Mt 20:25-28; Mk 10:42-45), Jesus was not simply calling for an external, organizational and structural change of roles in the society so that secular and dominating power is taken from the powerful and given to those who are powerless, from the strong to the weak and from the rich to the poor. Rather, he was pointing to a radically new way of exercising power, i.e., powerlessly. He was not simply calling for a radical overthrowing of governments but to a serious overhauling of hearts whereby guided by the Spirit of Jesus people can peep through walls of their own selfishness to the genuine needs, concerns and goals of others and give way to each other for the wellbeing, growth and fulfilment of all. In brief, secular use of power makes another do what one wants; the type of power that Jesus envisioned makes one do what another genuinely needs.

Following the Master who sat at the feet of his disciples to wash them, saying, “I have given you a model to follow, so that as I have done for you, you should also do (Jn 13:15), the exercise of power by those in authority in the Church cannot simply ape the secular and dominating models of authority out there in the world. Striving to give flesh to that spirit of Jesus, the spirit of giving way to each other for the good of all, in the structures, offices and exercise of authority ought to be the ongoing task of Christian exercise of authority.

Goal of Authority

The fourth commandment of the Decalogue gives us a fundamental insight about the goal of parental authority and derivatively of all authority. The fourth commandment is the only commandment that

enjoins a promise, "... that you may have a long life and prosperity in the land which the Lord, your God, is giving you" (Deut 5:16). The Letter to the Ephesians, offers the comment, "This is the first commandment with a promise" (6:1). The gravitational pull of a promise is in the future. It stands in the horizon of the 'will be' and beckons those to whom it is addressed. We can paraphrase the content of the fourth commandment's promise as the "increase of life".³ Increase or growth towards fullness of life (Jn 10:10) therefore, is the objective set for authority by the divine commandment. The same is the criterion to evaluate the exercise of authority in the Church. 'Does this exercise of authority, this expression of power, contribute to the genuine 'increase of life' of the subject whether it be a person or a community?' is the perennial question that should haunt all those in authority in the church. It is true that law, order and unity are important to an ecclesial community. But it is also true that human history is full of examples of trampling 'the heads of the weak into the dust of the earth' (Amos 2:7), in the name of law and order and unity. The claims under the guise of law, order and unity too must be subjected to the scrutiny of the criterion of 'increase of life'.

A word about life itself is in order. Life is never lived in the abstract but always in concrete circumstances. It is always lived "in the land which the Lord, your God, is giving you" as the promise of the fourth commandment pictures it. But the concreteness of life is not all of life. Life in the Promised Land is also an eschatological parable that points us towards a life in the "... **new** heavens and a **new** earth, in which righteousness dwells" (2 Pet 3:11). Therefore increase of life is not just about enhancing the comfort level of our existence here on earth but also transforming human life in alignment with the promises of God and with the way of life followed by Jesus himself.

The goal of authority enjoined by the fourth commandment, as described above, coincides with the etymological meaning of the word 'authority'. The word is from the Latin *auctoritas*, from *auctor* (cause,

³Jon MilièLochman, *Signposts to Freedom: The Ten Commandments and Christian Freedom* (Belfast: Christian Journals Limited, 1981), 84.

sponsor, promoter, surety), from *augere* to increase, make grow, enrich, etc.⁴ Therefore, setting life, whether personal or that of the community, free for many killing conditions that stifle it, protecting its spontaneity from any undue assault and nourishing and orienting life towards its God-intended fullness without distortion are the fundamental goals of authority as well as the criteria to evaluate whether or not an exercise of authority has been authentic.

Style of Authority: Lessons from Moses

The book of Numbers (11:11-17, 24-29) gives us some insights about authentic exercise of authority from the life of Moses. Even a great leader like Moses grew weary of the burden of authority and leadership. Complains and dissatisfaction all around raised self-doubt and so he complained to God, “‘Why do you treat your servant so badly’? Moses asked the Lord. ‘Why are you so displeased with me that you burden me with all this people? Was it I who conceived all this people? or was it I who gave them birth, that you tell me to carry them at my bosom, like a foster father carrying an infant, to the land you have promised under oath to their fathers?’” (Num 11:11-12).

The people themselves are not to be blamed for their complaints. Today’s hunger blurs grandiose visions of future. Promise of tomorrow’s fulfilment does little to a throat parched by feverish thirst. Pangs of real hunger beams in nostalgic memories of the flesh-pots of Egypt, never mind the slavery. Goals and ideals fly in the face of real threat to life. A morsel of food appears more inviting than the Promised Land when hunger is real and there is no food in sight. To lead a people lost in such existential problems towards a future full of hope is difficult. To do it alone is impossible. So Moses agonises privately before his God. The questions he asks are familiar, “Why O Lord?” “How do I do this?”

God’s Answer to Moses is “co-responsibility”. “Assemble for me seventy of the elders of Israel, men you know for true elders and authorities among the people, and bring them to the meeting tent. When

⁴Karl Rahner and others, eds., *Sacramentum Mundi: An Encyclopedia of Theology*, vol. 1 (London: Burns & Oates, 1969),

they are in place beside you, I will come down and speak with you there. I will also take some of the spirit that is on you and will bestow it on them, that they may share the burden of the people with you. You will then not have to bear it by yourself" (Num 11:16-17). The key to effective exercise of authority is to expose more and more people to the spirit, and enable more and more people to see the vision, hear the promise and be powered by energies that flow from sight and sound of God.

Moses saw the wisdom of God's word and did according to its bidding. He selected seventy elders and had them stand around about the tent. "The Lord then came down in the cloud and spoke to him. Taking some of the spirit that was on Moses, he bestowed it on the seventy elders; and as the spirit came to rest on them, they prophesied" (Num 11:25). Around the tent of meeting those chosen by Moses were exposed to the Spirit of God and His vision for the people. What Moses had experienced on the slope of mount Horeb, the elders did now. The burning bush had then burned Moses' heart with a vision of freedom for his people and now the spirit of God burned the hearts of these elders with the same vision. Now they needed no leader to goad them on; no law to compel them to hold the course. They themselves had seen the vision, heard the promise and were powered by the fire within. Co-responsibility in its essence can be seen here.

Numbers 11 further tells us that not all 70 elders selected by Moses went up to tent of meeting at the behest of Moses. Two of them, Eldad and Medad, stayed behind in the camp. When the Lord, poured the spirit upon those elders around the tent of meeting, the spirit rested upon those two who stayed behind at the camp as well and they, like the other sixty eight, prophesied. Now a young man ran and told Moses that those two elders who had not heeded Moses' bidding to go to the tent of meeting were also prophesying. Joshua, the long-time aide of Moses gave expression perhaps to the feeling of many who had heard the news, "Moses, my lord, stop them" (Num 11:28). The men had not exactly followed the instruction of Moses. How could they rightly receive the spirit and prophesy since they had not obeyed Moses! So they could not have received the spirit from God and they must be forbidden to manifest the spirit.

The large-hearted leader that he was, Moses gave a reply that must be approximated by everyone who wishes to exercise authority authentically: "Are you jealous for my sake? Would that all the people of the Lord were prophets! Would that the Lord might bestow his spirit on them all!" (Num 11:29). Moses wished not only Eldad and Medad to receive the spirit of God, to see the vision, and hear the promise, but every one of the people of Israel. He wished every Israelite to prophesy.

Genuine co-responsibility has nothing to do with that jealous guarding of one's territory and realm of competence and see anyone out of line with one's own line of vision and the mode of its implementation as a challenge and a threat to one's authority. Co-responsibility, therefore, is not thrusting down one's point of view forcefully on others and insists that they do the same things one does in the same way. It is rather a fundamental openness to the infinite ways in which the spirit can be present and active in the life of others.

Co-responsibility has nothing to do with a jealous heart which plays the game of being different from and superior to others; nor has anything to do with attitudes that treat some privileges as one's own private preserve inaccessible to others. On the part of those in authority co-responsibility should mean that large heartedness which opens up landscapes, otherwise inaccessible to the members. Co-responsibility on the part of the members should mean active participation in seeing the vision, hearing the promise and being fired by the spirit.

Style of Authority: Lessons from Jesus

It is our Christian faith that Jesus Christ is the final word of salvation that God spoke in salvation history (Heb 1:1-3; Jn 1:14). This final Word of salvation God spoke is a word of powerlessness, a weak word; a word which does not dominate and overpower but which invites, persuades and calls to spontaneous inner conversion. A virgin inexplicably conceiving, a babe in a manger, a boy growing up in Nazareth as a carpenter's son, and a man falsely accused, unjustly condemned and cruelly killed on the cross indeed a weak language. Paul tells us that God has chosen to save this world not through wisdom and power but through the folly of the cross; the Greek seek wisdom

and the Jews signs but we preach Christ crucified, a folly to the gentiles and a stumbling block to the Jews but to those who believe this is the power of God unto salvation (cf. 1 Cor 1:21-25).

In his life and teaching Jesus illustrated this language of salvation and tried to train his disciples in this language of weakness and powerlessness. To a man who said, "Lord I will follow you wherever you go" Jesus replied "Foxes have holes, birds of the air have nest, but the son of man has nowhere to lay his head" (Lk 9:57-58). John describes how Jesus washed the feet of the disciples and gave them an example of service (Jn 13:13-15). These and other statements of Jesus (Mt 16:24-25; Jn 12:24; 15:13) provide ample evidence as to how persons and communities of human beings must live in this world in order to usher in God's salvation into this world. The use of secular and dominating power by one person over another, one group of people over another and one nation against another has brought humanity to the brink of self-destruction. Everyday horrendous images of the consequences of the worldly use of power are beamed into our living rooms. Yet wise leaders of nations continue to thumb their chest to crow their superiority, strength and dominance over others. Jesus strongly argued for a radically new way of exercising power, that of giving way to one another. The human person and the human community could approximate what God intended for them only through this language of powerlessness. It is in learning to live this language the salvation of the world lies. Jesus himself lived this language of powerlessness to the last ounce of his life and to the last drop of his blood and that too at the young age of thirty three.

Jesus illustrated how this language of powerlessness was to be lived in different settings. He left us with the metaphors of a steward set in charge of a household who wins his master's trust precisely by being accountable to his master regarding his responsibilities towards the members of the household (Mk 10:43-45; Lk 12:42-48); a servant who although must play a master's role would do it in a servant-like manner (Lk 22:24-27; Mt 20:26-28); a shepherd who creates trust among the sheep by courageously caring for them to the point of laying down his life for them (Jn 10:11). In other words one who lives this language of

salvation, the language of powerlessness, although set in charge of God's household would exercise his authority in a servant-like manner and would lead the household into the future generating the same trust and love in the community which a shepherd generates among his sheep.

In the Church, the community Jesus founded, any other exercise of power, other than the one described above, has to be recognized for what it is – a this-worldly exercise of power. To claim Jesus' authority to any exercise of dominating power, however subtly it may be practised, is to dilute something that was radically close to the heart of Jesus and being unfaithful to the master who chose to exercise his Lordship washing his disciples' feet and finally from the cross even to the point of death. As a human community living in this world the Church cannot escape the exercise of worldly power. In situations of emergency she may have to sometimes exercise power in a dominating manner. What is argued for here is that such exercises of power should be recognized for what it truly is – secular use of power – and no claim of authority of God or of Jesus should be attached to such secular use of power.

Functions of Authority in the Church

1. Authority in service of Truth

God's word is truth (Jn 17:17; 1:14, 17) and that truth in person is Jesus Christ.⁵ The truth that God communicates of himself and for our salvation through his incarnate Son is eternal and perennial. When the eternal truth from heaven is caught by earthen vessels it is caught only in imperfect and fragmented form. That is not to say God's communication is unintelligible or imperfect. The unintelligibility of his communication comes from the limitedness of the human receiver as well as from the cacophony of other noises generated by the tendencies of the human heart to "self-deceit, closed-in egoism and malice"⁶ which stifle the sound of God's word from resounding unimpeded in the human heart.

⁵Walter Kasper, *Theology and Church* (New York: Crossroad Publishing Company, 1992), 138.

⁶*Ibid.*, 137.

On the one hand God's word in an overall way guides us towards the ultimate ends: "I have set before you life and death, the blessing and the curse. Choose life, then, that you and your descendants may live, by loving the Lord, your God, heeding his voice, and holding fast to him" (Deut 30:19-20). On the other hand God's word is received in the specific historical context of the receiver who must interpret God's truth in this his concrete situation. Thus the truth of God's word revealed in Jesus Christ is received both in the abstract as an ideal towards which we must journey and in the concrete as an obligation which we must fulfil in the here and now. The abstract ideals highlight what is deepest and godly in the human heart and hold before it a mirror in which it vaguely sees itself as it ought to be thereby experiencing an ache for what it is not yet and a longing for its fullness.

Jesus' encounter with the scribes and Pharisees and the adulterous woman (Jn 8:3-11) is a good commentary on these two aspects of God's truth discussed above. There is a numinous and perennial truth about adultery being a terrible wrong in the setting of a marital relationship between two persons committed to life-long fidelity. Jesus who radically and intensively interpreted the sixth commandment (Mt 5:27-28) was not revising the wrongness of adultery as he met the adulterous woman with out-of-the-world compassion. Jesus gathers the numinous truth about adultery and mixes it with another truth about human life lived in the concrete: "Let the one among you who is without sin be the first to throw a stone at her." According to Deuteronomy 17:7, it was those who witnessed the adultery who were to throw the first stone. Jesus calls also the witnesses to take a good look at themselves before daring to raise their hands against the guilty. The abstract wrongness of adultery mixed with the concrete reality of sin in every human life gives birth to another truth that set every one free including the adulterous woman (Jn 8:32). The new truth implicitly declares that human life being what it is, in this case, there was no need for judgment and condemnation and throwing of stones. There is also the implicit declaration that the Old Testament law requiring death penalty for adultery (Deut 22:22) did not adequately gather God's truth. The perennial wrongness of adultery is confirmed by Jesus as he finally exhorts the woman, "Go, and from now on do not sin any more" (Jn 8:11).

The role that Jesus plays in this event is the role that Authority in the Church should play in the service of God's truth. On the one hand, it must as clearly as possible proclaim the truth of God become flesh in Jesus Christ and in this way clarifying and motivating the members of the Church to journey towards God's numinous and perennial truth. At the same time authority in the church must recognize that the members of the Church by their baptism are not only receivers of God's truth but also witnesses to it in their life situation. This means that authority must be open to and actively listen to the sense of faith among the faithful especially in those areas where faith and life interpenetrate each other. This calls for a continuous dialogue between authority and the faithful on doctrinal matters as well which is mutually enriching. Where such processes of listening and dialogue are missing authority in the church might become less relevant to the faithful and the Church as a whole may not be doing enough to gather God's truth. Church's teaching on contraception and its reception or lack of reception by vast number of Catholics all over the world might be an illustration of what is being said here. By his encyclical *Humanae vitae* (1968) Pope Paul VI declared that every intentional use of artificial contraception as intrinsically evil. Nearly fifty years after the encyclical one can look back and say that vast number of Catholics have in practice rejected the teaching of the magisterium in their lives. No Catholic would say that artificial contraception is the ideal that God intended for wholesome sexual expression in marriage. Given the concrete circumstances of their lives many Catholics would say that artificial contraception is something unavoidable. There are good people who genuinely seek to live God's truth. In their estimation the magisterial teaching on contraception has not succeeded in gathering the numinous aspect of God's truth into the concrete circumstances of their lives as Jesus did in the event of the adulterous woman who stood before him.

2. *Authority in Service of Diversity*

There is a curious statement in the Genesis narrative about the Tower of Babel which makes the reader wonder why God did what he did! "Then the Lord said: 'If now, while they are one people, all speaking the same language, they have started to do this, nothing will later stop

them from doing whatever they presume to do. Let us then go down and there confuse their language, so that one will not understand what another says'. Thus the Lord scattered them from there all over the earth, and they stopped building the city" (Gen 11:6-8). Apparently God did not want such efficient uniformity in human community that tended to ride roughshod over diversity of individuals and groups. When a community becomes too efficient in carrying out its intended goal it tends to reduce individuals and groups to cogs in the wheel reducing their capacity to be creative and take initiatives. Genuine diversity expresses the wealth of God's creation and opens up possibilities for individuals and groups to develop and express their gifts and talents in freedom but always in the service of the community so that the latter is enriched.

The Pentecostal event in Acts of the Apostles stands in sharp contract with the fallout of the building of the Tower of Babel. The work of the Spirit resulted not in a unification of all languages into one but in a diversity of languages, people and culture who could now understand each other while maintaining their differences. The wind of God blew on every individual and each one in that upper room had a share of the tongues of fire but as members of the community gathered together. No one outside the community received the Spirit. There is a democratization of the community ruling out any kind of unnecessary elitism or monopolization of authority or office. We should not imagine that this Cenacle community would seat people in the upper room doing away with all their differences. Rather in this community people would have their hearts as wide as God's so that they would consider the differences as wealth in the community rather than walls that divide.

Authority in the Church can only function authentically when it works in line with the working of the Spirit in the Pentecostal community. Participation, collaboration, teamwork, sharing and communion are the underlying principles working in this community of disciples unified by the Spirit. The issue here is not a choice between hierarchical or democratic forms of structuring the Church. We know that a system is as good as the persons who populate it. The issue here is how those in authority can make the life of every member and of every group with

their particularities and charisms grow and flourish. There is no place for autocracy here which puts the system before people and maintains the status quo at the cost of initiatives and charisms of people. Diversity of liturgy and piety to some extent are already present in the Catholic Church. Diversity of theology and organizational diversity have proved more problematic in the Church. The responsibility of a steward, the devotion of a servant and the sensitive care of a shepherd are the metaphors that comes to one's mind if authority is to serve genuine diversity which celebrates the creative wealth of God.

3. *Authority in Service of Communion*

"The concept of *communion* lies 'at the heart of the Church's self-understanding' insofar as it is the Mystery of the personal union of each human being with the divine Trinity and with the rest of mankind, initiated with the faith and, having begun as a reality in the Church on earth, is directed towards its eschatological fulfilment in the heavenly Church."⁷ Communion in the Church is grounded on and modelled after the Trinitarian communion. When we say that God is Trinity we are not speaking of a theological concept that obfuscates difficult questions about God and our world by relegating them to the mysterious. The term in everyday language means that God is relationship – one in essence three in persons. Trinity is individuality and plurality in perfect harmony in the Godhead. God is a community of three persons in perfectly harmonious communion among them without of course losing the distinctive individuality of each person. St. John writes that "God is love" (I Jn 4:8, 16). God is not in love with himself. Being love in his essence God is 'Being turned outward.' He is not 'Being in,' but 'Being with and Being for.' The word love in its essence refers to the flow of existence and life from the self to the other. Therefore, when we say that God is love, we mean that God is the flow of existence and life from the self to the other making the other to exist, to live, to grow and reach fulfilment. It is in this Trinitarian image God made human beings.

⁷ Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, *Letter to the Bishops of the Catholic Church on Some Aspects of the Church Understood as Communion*, 28 May 1992, n. 3

He who said, "Let us make man in our image, after our likeness" (Gen 1:26), also said, "It is not good that man should be alone" (Gen 2:18). These creative words of the creator God have structured into human hearts a longing for the other. It is this longing that drives us out of our own selves in search of relationships. Loneliness, as longing for another, is the flow of Trinitarian love embedded in human hearts.

While we are structured in such a way that our hearts long for the other, the presence of the other also poses problems and challenges to the self. The book of Genesis graphically summarizes this tension between individuality and plurality. The first man who exclaimed in great excitement when presented with the first woman, "This one, at last is bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh" (Gen 2:23), also complained, "The woman whom you put here with me - she gave me fruit from the tree, so I ate" (Gen 3:12). These two statements of Adam highlight both the thrill and joy caused by a relationship and the tensions and challenges it poses to each individual self. A relationship is individuality in dialogue with plurality. When this dialogue resolves the tension between individuality and plurality in a creative and life-giving way then the relationship turns out to be healthy and life-enhancing. When this dialogue is absent, or when present, it turns out to be stifling or destructive and the tension between individuality and plurality is intensified and the relationship itself becomes destructive of the self and others. Trinitarian love, in contrast, refers to the infinitely perfect resolution of this tension between individuality of each person of the Trinity and the plurality of the three persons. Each individual person has needs, desires, goals and viewpoints that often stand at variance with those of others. Being created in the image of the triune God human beings discover, affirm and fulfil their true selves in finding a midway between the needs, desires, goals and viewpoints of the self and those of the other through a process of dialogue and interaction and in this way arriving at harmony of relationship. Such harmony cannot be achieved without giving up something of the self in order to promote the being and becoming of the other. It is in attaining this harmony in relationships that we become full images of the Triune God. It is also in and through this harmony that we make visible in this world the love of the Triune God. The Lord's words express this truth very succinctly,

“that they may all be one; even as thou, Father, art in me, and I in thee, that they also may be in us, so that the world may believe that thou hast sent me” (Jn 17:21).

There is still another truth that Trinitarian communion highlights. Trinitarian stance towards life stands sharply in contrast to individualistic approach to life. Individualism insists that the individual is the basic unit of human reality and that all types of community are secondary and accidental. Trinitarian communion, on the other hand, places the other and community at the centre of things. Thoughts, decisions and actions are determined not only on the basis of the needs, desires, goals and viewpoints of the self but the concerns of the other and others are also equally taken into account. Jesus summarized this truth sharply when he said, “So whatever you wish that men would do to you, do so to them; for this is the law and the prophets” (Mt. 7:12).

At the most fundamental level when we speak of the Church as communion we are referring the communion of the faithful who are caught up into the love-relational dynamics of the Trinity. Authority in the community must be the centre and model of Trinitarian outflow of other-centred love and life. It can never seek to dominate but strive to make itself the servant of the faith and the giftedness of all members. Authority must be sensitive to the concerns and interests of all the members in the communion but with specific focus on those of the weak. It would seek to function within the principles and practice of dialogue and a proper mutuality. It would ensure that tendencies to personal and autocratic authority were restricted in favour of structures which promote partnership, collegiality and co-responsibility and a genuine sense of the equality of all the faithful through baptism. It would also ensure that structures were in place to promote honest and effective communication and also to ensure maximum consultation, consensus forming and participation in decision-making and taking. It would train both clergy and laity in the spirituality of communion. It would not seek to bring responsibility for all issues under one central authority but seek to decentralize authority especially on matters that do not pertain to faith but fall in the category of disciplinary rules and regulations, management issues, social and moral issues, etc., and seek to ensure

that responsibility for them is where possible dispersed to the most appropriate people whether clerical or lay. It would facilitate processes of development, change and diversification in order to meet the Church's mission to a changing world, rather than seem to inhibit development because of anxiety concerning unity. Above all it would foster a community of love, mutuality and respect across the current divides of gender, race, culture, caste, class and differences of giftedness.⁸

4. *Authority in the Service of Unity*

"Unity, or oneness, is generally regarded as the attribute of a thing whereby it is undivided in itself and yet divided from others."⁹ The Church's central purpose is to witness to God's unifying and reconciling love in Christ. Therefore the unity of all human beings and their communion with God is the goal towards which the Church is directed.¹⁰ While the philosophical notion of unity involves oneness of a thing and separation from others the Christian vision of unity is inclusive of all and separation from none. "God was reconciling the world to Himself in Christ, not counting their trespasses against them, and entrusting to us the message of reconciliation" (2Cor 5:19). Unity in and by the Church can be fully seen as cooperation with this reconciling project of God. The ultimate goal of this project is the eschatological vision that "God will be all in all" (1Cor 15:28). The Acts of the Apostles describes the essential elements of this unity as: "They devoted themselves to the teaching of the apostles and to the communal life, to the breaking of the bread and to the prayers" (Acts 2:42). These can be paraphrased as unity of faith, unity of worship and unity of service.¹¹

⁸Paul Hypher, "Authority in the Parish," *Priests and People* 11 (August/September 1997): 346-347.

⁹*New Catholic Encyclopedia*, second edition, s.v. "Unity," by E. G. Salmon.

¹⁰Vatican Council II, The Dogmatic Constitution on the Church *Lumen gentium*, 21 November 1964, n. 1

¹¹Joseph A. Komonchak and others, eds., *The New Dictionary of Theology* (Bangalore: Theological Publications in India, 1996), s.v. "Unity of the Church," by Timothy Macdonald.

The pillars on which the edifice of unity stands are: "One Lord, one faith, one baptism" (Eph 4:5)

In this situation authority in the Church aiming for unity can only be ministers of reconciliation, seeking to get to deeper approximation of God's truth in Jesus Christ which reconciles apparently irreconcilable positions without compromising the numinous truth which they ever seek. True, there are times they must stand up with Peter and the apostles and say what they said before the Sanhedrin, "We must obey God rather than men" (Acts 5:29). In general if the authority figures in the Catholic Church can avoid the conviction that their stance on doctrinal and other matters is the only authentic one and all others divergent from theirs are erroneous and therefore to be condemned, much unity can be achieved in faith, worship and service allowing authentic diversity in all these three.

Conclusion

The Church is God's ongoing project in Jesus Christ, guided by the Holy Spirit. Living in a secular world the Church cannot but be tinged by secular exercise of authority which stands in sharp contrast with Jesus' vision of exercise of authority. Jesus never uses the words 'rule', 'power' or 'authority' in relation to his disciples. Neither is the concept of an 'authority of service' present in Jesus' sayings.¹² He simply asked his disciples to become servants and slaves who in ancient society were in no way associated with authority and power. Jesus' lordship was the result of his utter self-emptying obedience to the Father to the point of death on the cross (Phil 2:7-8). This was his vision of life for his disciples and for the community he was leaving behind in this world. This vision of Jesus requires, probably among many others, at least two dispositions on the part of authority figures in the Church:

Firstly, those who exercise authority in the Church must sincerely recognize and acknowledge all that is secular in style and content in their exercise of authority. They should also resist the temptation of

¹² Cf. John L. Mackenzie, *Authority in the Church* (London: Chapman, 1996), 30-33.

invoking divine sanction for what is purely this worldly and secular. Secondly, while acknowledging the inevitability of exercising secular authority, they must constantly seek to give flesh to Jesus' ideal of becoming slaves even in the secular aspects of their exercise of authority. This calls for much motivational unmasking: "Is this office or position I hold an instrument of self-glory, of self-assertion, of being superior to others, of prominent seats in public places and honour before men? Or is it a gift unworthily received to be held to glorify God and serve the Master who hides himself among the least? No one can make a judgment on this one way or another except the holder of the office or position.

Perhaps authority figures in the Church need to kneel before the crucified Christ and ask themselves every day, "How can I get crucified today in obedience to the Father for the fullness of life of those who are entrusted to me?"

Sensus fidei and the Role of Laity in the Synodal Church

Errol A. D'Lima

Vatican II viewed the Church as People of God. The mission of the Church was to be jointly carried out by hierarchy and laity. The anointing of the Spirit gave the hierarchy and the laity rights and responsibilities. The *sensus fidei* would always lead the individual to the final end, God. The reception of Vatican II and the impact of the post-Vatican II documents would best take place in a Synodal Church characterized by listening to one another. In it, the laity will discover their role in the Church and world.

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The self-understanding of the Church in Vatican II contrasts with that in Vatican I. *Lumen Gentium*, the Dogmatic Constitution on the Church, identified the community of the baptized as the primary subject in the Church, not the hierarchy. The categories of hierarchy and laity were taken up later to describe the functions of each in the one, common mission of the Church. Anointed by the Holy Spirit, the People of God constitute the universal body of the baptized, the teaching as well as the listening Church. Both have the responsibility of preserving, protecting and proclaiming the word of God, though the teaching Church does so in virtue of its office. The *sensus fidelium* refers to the gift of faith that every baptized person possesses so that he or she is instinctively drawn to the object of that faith, God. Further, when there is universal consent from the bishops to the last of the faithful on a matter concerning faith or morals, error cannot occur. The Spirit's anointing produces in each of the faithful the "supernatural appreciation

of faith,” often referred to as *sensus fidei*.¹ In LG, chapter 4 on The Laity, no. 35, the following is stated:

Christ is the great prophet who proclaimed the kingdom of the Father both by the testimony of his life and by the power of his word. Until the full manifestation of his glory, he fulfils this prophetic office, not only by the hierarchy who teach in his name and by his power, but also by the laity. He accordingly both establishes them as witnesses and provides them with the appreciation of faith (*sensus fidei*) and the grace of the word [*testes constituit et sensu fidei instruit* (Acts 2, 17-18; Apoc 19, 10)] so that the power of the Gospel may shine out in the daily family and social life.

If both hierarchy and laity together manifest the glory of God in the world, there is need of a lived unity between the two to further the one mission of the Church. How would it be effected?

Chapter IV of LG treats of the laity and spells out their function and dignity. By Baptism they share in the priestly, prophetic and kingly office of Christ, “and to the best of their ability carry on the mission of the whole Christian people in the Church and in the world.” “...it belongs to the laity to seek the kingdom of God by engaging in temporal affairs and directing them according to God’s will.” (31) There is “a true equality between all with regard to the dignity and to the activity which is common to all the faithful in the building up of the body of Christ.” (32) They have their rights and duties while owing obedience to those in authority representing Christ. (36-38)

In Vatican II, the document *Apostolicam Actuositatem*, Decree on the Apostolate of Lay People, no. 2 described the laity as sharing in the character of priest, prophet and king and participating by right in the overall mission of the Church. At the same time, it asked that a lay spirituality be developed, and identified the role of the laity as evangelizing and sanctifying the People of God by bringing the Gospel message to permeate and improve the temporal order. The decree also saw itself as a stimulus for the laity to respond to the needs and

¹ “...*mediante supernaturali sensu fidei*...” LG 12. Chapter II, The People of God.

expectations of God's People throughout the world, and in nos. 11 and 12, asked that the laity influence the social environment.² Collaboration and dialogue with others including those of other faith persuasions were to be attempted at the national and international levels to realize apostolic ends.³

AA outlines the areas where the laity's participation is regarded as important. The laity can move into and merge with secular society and influence it for the good of people. They constitute the presence of the Church in areas or situations where there is a shortage of priests or a persecution is taking place. They can act concertedly to attend to human and Christian needs. (16) Group apostolates may better effect unity between the members' life of faith and daily life in the world. (18) Though linked to ecclesiastical authority, the laity have the right to establish and direct associations of their own or join existing ones in the interests of their apostolic endeavours. (19) It should be noted that Catholic Action is the collaboration of the laity in the apostolate of the hierarchy. (20) Further, the laity can be entrusted "with certain charges more closely connected with the duties of pastors: in the teaching of Christian doctrine, for example; in certain liturgical actions, in the care of souls. (24)

All the above considerations concerning the laity, their dignity, function and specific apostolic task were finalized during the council by the council fathers. However, what the council had finalized was still to be made operational in the lives of all those, including the laity, who were not present at the council. This could happen through the process of reception.

²AA 13. "The postulate in one's social environment endeavours to infuse the Christian spirit into the mentality and behaviour, laws and structures of the community in which one lives."

³AA 14. "Catholics are to be keen on collaborating with men of good will in the promotion of all that is true, just, holy, all that is worthy of love (cf. Phil 4/8). They are to enter into dialogue with them, approaching them with understanding and courtesy; and are to search for means of improving social and public institutions along the lines of the Gospel."

Reception of Vatican II

An ecumenical council is an occasion when the collegiality of the bishops is exercised in function of the universal Church (Canon 337), and is called by the pope (Canon 338, # 1) who determines the agenda of the council. An ecumenical council can be viewed as the coming together of bishops from around the world who form a suitable context where important matters concerning the universal Church are discussed and decisions reached. However, these decisions - even when approved and promulgated by the pope - are still the outcome of a small group of individuals. What of the vast majority of believers in the Church?

It is not enough for those participating in an ecumenical council to understand and agree with what a council teaches in its dogmatic and doctrinal statements. Since the council represents the whole Church, the collegial action of the bishops united to the pope must be seen as meaningful by the entire People of God. The process by which such understanding and agreement by the faithful takes place among all is known as Reception of a Council. Reception of a council pertains to the effect that a council has in the life of faith of the Church and has two moments. The first is when the council fathers affirm decisions/statements as a church body with the pope. The second moment is the gradual awareness and acceptance of those decisions/statements by the whole Church. This awareness does not consist of a mere intellectual assent but must be integrated in the life of each believer. The reception of a council includes those processes by which the whole Church understands, agrees with and makes operational the results (texts) of a council. This takes time and may last many years. It is meant to be an active reception so that what is decided in a council is scrutinized, understood and even further developed by all those who were not part of the ecumenical council.

The *sensus fidei* becomes significant when the outcome of a council is received actively. In virtue of their anointing, people are disposed to receive a council's outcome so that they may study it and discover its relevance to their daily living. Hence, they may question propositions coming from the council; discuss a council's findings and develop them further; or they may reject some statements of the council.

Questioning the statements of an ecumenical council takes place so that a “fideistic” acceptance of council teaching is avoided; discussing a council’s findings often leads to recognizing the further implications of the teaching promulgated by the council; rejection of a council’s teaching is an invitation to the magisterium to retrace or nuance its positions in matters of faith and morals. It is another matter if a council puts out something defined as of faith.

In *Christifideles Laici* (CL), the Post-Synodal Exhortation of John Paul II on the Vocation and Mission of the Lay Faithful in the Church and in the World. (Dec. 30, 1988), the pope takes up the Vatican II insights concerning lay participation in the Church and spells out the concrete ways in which the laity is to recognize, understand and carry out its role. In CL, the pope is actively supporting the process of reception so that the laity may better profit by the contents of AA. Using the Vineyard of the Lord theme (Matt 20/1-2), CL exhorts the laity to beware of two temptations: a) being so involved in Church activities that they do not engage in responsibilities in the professional, social, cultural and political world, and b) separating the acceptance of the gospel from the actual living out of it in situations of life. Everyone is called to enter the vineyard and work in it.

CL outlines the ways in which the world of the secular becomes a platform for the gospel message to be recognized and appreciated. Diversity of ministries in the Church calls for different charisms to be exercised in the Church. The lay person is given charisms so that the values of the Kingdom of God may be lived out in the world. While the ordained minister is meant to be professionally competent in proclaiming the word, celebrating the sacraments and exercising pastoral care within the Christian community, the lay person - through his or her professional competence, social concern and activism, and fraternal charity - witnesses to the divine presence and its humanizing influence in the secular areas of life.

The presence of the lay faithful is necessary both in the universal and the particular Churches. Their participation in pastoral and diocesan councils ensures that decisions made are helpful to the lives of persons. By consulting the laity, the priest ensures that well - informed decisions

are reached which will be supported by the church community and collaboration will be forthcoming more easily.

In the process of reception, CL draws special attention to the place of women in the Church. The letter of apology to women written by in 1994 by Pope John Paul II recognized that women had been denied their rightful place in the Church. CL asks that the status and role of women be appreciated. (49) While they may not receive the sacrament of orders or be ministerial priests (since these are in the area of function and not dignity), women can participate in diocesan and parish pastoral councils. They bring dignity to the conjugal life and motherhood and assure the moral climate of culture. The children in the family are influenced in their early years mostly by their mothers. In addition, a woman is often called to parent children in the family when the father must go far places to earn for the family. Women overcome the ill effects of "male absenteeism." God specially entrusts human beings to women.

Finally, the lay person fulfils his/her mission when he/she as a member of the Church is also fully a citizen of human and secular society. (59) For this mission, spiritual and doctrinal formation is necessary as well as the cultivation of human values. (60)

The process of reception presupposes an understanding of the importance of each member of the Church in witnessing to the gospel message. In the past, too much was made of the place and rights of those in the ordained ministry based on the premise that governance and final decision-making in the Church were the prerogatives of the ordained. AA has retrieved the importance of the laity. What would be the type of Church within which the ordained and the un-ordained could work in a fruitful unity? Pope Francis answers by elaborating on the Synodal Church.

The Synodal Church

In Vatican II's *Christus Dominus*, Decree on the Pastoral Office of Bishops in the Church, no. 5, (October 28, 1965) provision was made for setting up a Synod of Bishops:

Bishops chosen from different parts of the world in a manner and according to a system determined or to be determined by the Roman Pontiff will render to the Supreme Pastor a more effective auxiliary service in a council which shall be known by the special name of Synod of Bishops. This council, as it will be representative of the whole Catholic episcopate, will bear testimony to the participation of all the bishops in hierarchical communion in the care of the universal Church.

Already in *Apostolica Sollicitudo*, the Apostolic Letter establishing the Synod of Bishops for the Universal Church (September 15, 1965), Pope Paul VI had conceived the idea of having a synod of bishops to assist him. Not only did this document indicate the usefulness of a group of bishops to offer feedback to the pope, but it was very specific as to who would be included in such a group, the duration of members in the group and their purpose. However, in practice, the Synod of Bishops did not live up to its full expectation, and the inputs to the pope came only from episcopal circles.⁴

On March 13, 2013 Pope Francis took over as the Bishop of Rome and from that moment, he began a new style of papal functioning. Its characteristic note was drawing inspiration and courage from the faith of simple people for he recognized God's action strongly at work in them. He believed that there should be continual and deep interaction between the laity and their pastors, the Teaching Church and the Listening Church, those in ordained ministries and the un-ordained - a single mission shared by all. In his first interview (September 2013) after becoming pope, with Antonio Spadaro as interviewer, Francis said:

We must walk together: the people, the bishops and the pope. Synodality should be lived at different levels. May be it is time to

⁴The Synod on Evangelization at which Fr. Amalorpavdass was one of the two secretaries illustrates the deficiencies of centralized organization that oversaw the Church's functioning. The Synods had their agenda prepared by Roman dicasteries and often it was the bishops themselves who were told what was expected of them.

change the methods of the Synod of Bishops, because it seems to me that the current method is not dynamic. This will also have ecumenical value, especially with our Orthodox brethren. From them we can learn more about the meaning of episcopal collegiality and the tradition of synodality. The joint effort of reflection, looking how the Church was governed in the early centuries, before the breakup between East and West, will bear fruit in the due time. In ecumenical relations it is important not only to know each other better, but also to recognize what the Spirit has sown in the other as a gift for us.⁵

Francis gave expression to this belief in an address that he gave, on the 50th anniversary of the institution of the Synod of Bishops.⁶

After stressing that a synod implied “journeying together,” the pope appreciated Pope Paul VI’s initiative after Vatican II “to reproduce the image of the Ecumenical council and reflect on its spirit and method.” Collegial, pastoral responsibility was seen in the Synod and now it would be extended to lay persons too. This happened in the Synod on the Family (2015) when families were invited to share their experiences and the pope let it be known that there was freedom to offer critical points of view which would be taken up for discussion and discernment.

Pope Francis was asking the Church to be synodal:

A Synodal Church is a Church which listens, which realizes that listening “is more than simple hearing.” It is a mutual listening in which everyone has something to learn. The faithful people, the college of bishops, the Bishop of Rome: all listening to each other, and all listening to the Holy Spirit, “the Spirit of Truth” (*Jn 14/17*), in order to know what he “says to the Churches.” (*Rev 2/7*)⁷

⁵Paul Vellely: *Pope Francis Untying the Knots*, The Struggle for the Soul of Catholicism, Bloomsbury, Revised and expanded second edition, London/New York, 2015, 331.

⁶Address of His Holiness Pope Francis, on the occasion of the ceremony commemorating the 50th anniversary of the institution of the Synod of Bishops, in Paul VI Audience Hall, (Rome), Saturday, October 17, 2015.

⁷Address of Pope Francis.

Since all in the Church have the anointing of the Spirit, all can journey together (1 Jn 2/20, 27). The pope suggests that the *sensus fidei* prevents a rigid separation between the *Ecclesia discens* and the *Ecclesia docens*. In fact, the Word of God is given to the whole Church to be preserved and transmitted.⁸ It is correct to say that the whole Church teaches and that the whole Church listens. The office of the Teaching Church is to articulate officially and authoritatively the teaching of the Church. But the *sensus fidei* indicates the participation of the person anointed with the Spirit who is led in faith to affirm the truth of God as revealed in Jesus Christ.⁹ This is the responsibility of all the members of the Church. In addition to bishops, there have been many lay persons - many of them religious - who have contributed to Catholic doctrine and practice.

Mutual listening is what characterizes the Synodal Church according to the pope. He identifies three levels of mutual listening, and at each level the starting point is listening to the word of God. At the first level, mutual listening happens among people (local level); then the mutual listening takes place at the episcopal level when the bishop as head of the local Church interacts with the people. At the third level, the Bishop of Rome engages in mutual listening since he stands as "the guarantor of the obedience and the conformity of the Church to the will of God, to the Gospel of Christ, and to the tradition of the Church."¹⁰ In concrete,

⁸Refer Ch. Two of *Dei Verbum*.

⁹"Other phrases for the same idea are *consensus fidelium*. 'the consent of the faithful,' and *sensus fidei*, 'the sense of faith.' The last phrase, the sense of faith, points to an aspect of the knowability of faith; faith possesses what is called a 'connatural,' or instinctive, spontaneous, and intuitive knowledge of its object (God)...The sense of the faithful is thus the intuitive grasp on the truth of God that is possessed by the Church as a whole, as a consensus. It is both an adherence to the public teachings of the Church and an active charism of discernment, a power of practical and possessive knowledge belonging to the body of the faithful by virtue of their concrete living of the faith in response to God as Spirit." Roger Haight in Richard P. McBrien (General editor): *The HarperCollins Encyclopedia of Catholicism*, "*Sensus fidelium*," New York, 1995, 1182.

¹⁰Address of Pope Francis.

the first level includes diocesan synods, presbyter councils, chapters of canons and pastoral councils; the second level normally refers to conferences of bishops, and the third is constituted by the episcopal college with the pope heading it. The pope intends a synodal Church in the interests of ecumenism since listening to the other contributes to progress in relations among the different Churches. Finally, the pope sees a synodal Church as a reminder in the world calling for “participation, solidarity and transparency in public administration.”¹¹ Authentic power is service!

The Role of the Laity in a Synodal Church

In the light of what LG and AA have said about the co-responsibility of the laity in the carrying out of the single mission of the one Church, governance in the Church cannot be merely the exercise of a juridical action on the part of the hierarchical Church vis-à-vis the laity. In Church governance, there must be a clear recognition of the rights possessed by the laity in virtue of their anointing by the Spirit. A juridical action on the part of the pope or the episcopacy may not disregard the laity’s rights.¹² However, there is need for a commission or arbitration board in the Church where the laity, along with the hierarchy, is properly represented so that the rights of the laity are upheld. Juridical action that is preceded by dialogue which is a listening to the other with the head and heart will enable hierarchical authority and lay responsibility to achieve the goals set by the Spirit.

A positive development had taken place in 1972 when Pope Paul VI instituted lay ministries through his Apostolic Letter, *Ministeria Quaedam*. However, these were restricted to men alone. The theological foundation for this development arises from the baptismal

¹ Address of Pope Francis.

² In the CDF’s Instruction on the Ecclesial Vocation of the Theologian (1990) when Cardinal Joseph Ratzinger was prefect, the rights of the episcopacy are stressed over and over again in all situations of tension with theologians; however, not once is there mention of the rights of theologians which have to be respected by the episcopacy.

status of every Christian believer. In keeping with that foundation, every person in the Church is called to be perfect as their heavenly Father is perfect. (LG no. 40)

The lay person is given the responsibility of using his natural talents and secular accomplishments to witness to God's transforming presence in the world. He/she must develop skills and competence in the secular areas of life. The lay person would then be an asset as a member of the finance committee and of the pastoral council. Qualified lay persons bring credibility to the scene of their evangelization when they are recognized as competent professionals and trustworthy.

Gaudium et Spes draws attention to the different areas in which the contribution of the laity can make a difference. In the context of a dynamic world, any new humanism should preserve human responsibility for positive development in society; while the common good is pursued, attention must be given to the minority groups in a nation. Justice - commutative, distributive and social - offers a wide field in which the laity can be involved. The laity can use its position in civic space to bring about peace and reconciliation between hostile factions.

It is not only through the Christian that God's saving significance reaches humankind but also through the world of the secular where God's saving significance becomes concrete and visible in mysterious ways. GS 22: "For since Christ died for all, and since all men are in fact called to one and the same destiny, which is divine, we must hold that the Holy Spirit offers to all the possibility of being made partners, in a way known to God, in the paschal mystery." To experience God's manifestation in the secular world, the Church must be present in the world that is characterized by pluralism in life-styles, social concerns, economic systems, political governance and faith persuasions. This world is also one in which significant groups of persons are exploited and condemned to marginal positions in society. Their cause needs to be taken up. The person who is eminently qualified to carry out the Church's mission in a pluralist world, as well as take up the cause of human rights and dignity is the lay person who lives in close proximity to this world.

Resume

The role of the laity is something that has gradually appeared in the Church with the holding of Vatican II. Here the self-understanding of the Church was tied to the church community, the People of God. The *sensus fidelium* is given to all God's People in virtue of their baptism and anointing by the Spirit. This awareness decided the council fathers to clearly indicate that hierarchy and laity were not on parallel roads in carrying out the mission of the Church but that both shared together in a single mission. When the fruits of Vatican II were being communicated to the whole Church, the process of reception had begun. However, the reception was made in terms of a top-down pattern. The follow-up after Vatican II envisaged a modicum of synodality but only among the pope and bishops. Pope Francis has opted for synodality as a way of life in the church where listening and being listened to is present at three levels: the laity and their bishop, the bishops in their episcopal conferences and finally the bishops and the pope. But now it would not be a coming together of only the bishops and the pope, but the laity would also be present and their voices heard. This has already been done when the synod on the family was held in 2015. Henceforth, the role of the laity in a synodal Church will be one in which the laity's voice will be heard with the freedom to share experiences that will not always coincide with established positions in the Church. In addition, there are areas in the temporal sphere where the laity is best equipped to carry forward the mission of the Church while sharing a common responsibility for it with the hierarchy.

Reform in the Church, a Utopia?

Sebastian Athappilly

The article highlights certain important issues that require the attention of the church. The church is in need of an ongoing renewal and reform in different aspects of its life. The communion and Trinitarian ecclesiology call for reform in the Petrine ministry by creating a body consisting of heads of all the individual churches with the Supreme Pontiff and by giving adequate role to collegiality of the bishops. The faithful are to be treated as persons and certain powers are to be delegated to the laity. The author suggests creation of women cardinals and the provision of other lay representatives in the election of the pope. According to him the inculturation should go deeper to affect in the exercise of power and authority by making it a service. He presents a model of synodal structure from the early life of St. Thomas Christians of India. To keep the synodal structure intact, he suggests periodic survey and feedback regarding the performance of ecclesiastical leaders.

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0. Reform, Needed and Possible

*"Ecclesia semper reformanda (est)"*¹= the church (is) always to be reformed – is an acceptable and accepted dictum and principle in the church. It refers to the conviction that the church must continually re-examine itself in order to maintain its purity of doctrine and

¹For detailed discussion, cf. Theodor Mahlmann: *"Ecclesia semper reformanda"*. Eine historische Aufarbeitung. Neue Bearbeitung, in: Torbjörn Johansson, Robert Kolb, Johann Anselm Steiger (Hrsg.): *Hermeneutica Sacra. Studien zur Auslegung der Heiligen Schrift im 16. und 17. Jahrhundert*, Berlin - New York 2010, 382-441, here 384-388.

practice. The Second Vatican Council has given special impetus to the renewal and reform of the Catholic Church in many respects and at various levels. Whether the process has been adequately successful, is judged differently. Some see in this process a healthy progress and others, an unwarranted deviation.

Some of the main areas of reform since the Council have been synodality, commitment for the world and liberation of the people, empowerment of the laity and role of women in the church. In the spirit of reform endorsed and demanded by the Second Vatican Council and Post-conciliar discussions in various synods and other forums, the recent popes have tried to make some reform also in the curial administration at Vatican. One area of reform concerned the proportionate representation of the world church in the number of the cardinals. This was supposed to reduce the traditional Eurocentrism and Italian dominance in this matter. In the "creation" of new cardinals, thought was given hence to a fair and proportionate distribution from among the other churches and continents. Pope Francis has been since the beginning of his pontificate committed to this cause. In this connection we can mention the constitution of the nine-member Council of Cardinals to advise the Pope on serious matters, reforming the finances of the Vatican, which has mainly focused on the Vatican Bank, the Vatican City State, the Administration of the Patrimony of the Apostolic See, and the Congregation for Evangelization of Peoples, creation of a new Secretariat for the Economy to supervise Vatican finances.

1. Body based on Communion Ecclesiology

Pope Francis gives much importance to the synodal character of the church; we feel hence encouraged to dream about a body that has been overlooked for centuries, namely, a body consisting of the heads of all the individual churches at least of the Catholic Church, which is a **communion** of 23 Eastern/Oriental Catholic Churches together with the Western Latin Church. Consequently, it is desirable to have a body or Synod, consisting of all the heads of these individual churches. The pope will be in this body in two capacities: as the Supreme Pontiff and as the Patriarch (head) of the Western (Latin) Church. In addition to

the plenary body of all the individual heads, this can have also a special steering body of a fixed number of representatives (elected or appointed from time to time) from among the Eastern/Oriental churches on a rotational basis for a fixed period.

The lived practice of the communion of churches is referred to in numerous patristic texts. This was represented in terms of communion (*koinonia*). Its connection with the sacramental understanding of the body of Christ theology in 1Cor 10:16ff. is decisive for the entire ancient ecclesiology: "The cup of blessing that we bless, is it not a sharing in the blood of Christ? The bread that we break, is it not a sharing in the body of Christ? Because there is one bread, we who are many are one body, for we all partake of the one bread." The full meaning of the Pauline concept of *koinonia* is communion through participation. Its most important instance of application is in the celebration of the Lord's Supper, where the Eucharistic as well as the ecclesiological understanding of the body of Christ are combined together. J. Hainz writes in this sense as follows: "Since there are many who commonly participate in the body and blood of Christ, there emerges through this common participation also a relationship of communion among themselves: out of the Eucharistic communion through the common sharing in the body of Christ, there originates the church as the community, an ecclesial communion."²

St Paul makes use of the *koinonia*-model of the Eucharistic communion through sharing/participation (that is realised primarily in every concrete Eucharistic celebration of a community) in order to interpret the relationship among the communities, above all, of the Gentile Christian communities to the primitive Jerusalem community.³ Because the Gospel of salvation went out from Jerusalem, all the new communities stand in *koinonia* with the community in Jerusalem through the common participation in the Gospel, and so also with the apostles and the other mediators of the Gospel (Rom 15:26ff; Gal 6:6).

²*Koinonia. "Kirche" als Gemeinschaft bei Paulus* (BU 16), Regensburg, 1982, 173.

³M. Kehl, *Die Kirche. Eine katholische Ekklesiologie*, Dettelbach, 2009, 322.

In Rom 15:26f. Paul is speaking of the *koinonia* at the spiritual and material levels: the Gentiles sharing in the spiritual blessings have an obligation to share their material resources with the poor in Jerusalem as expression of their solidarity. In Rom 12:13 he speaks of the need to contribute to the needs of the saints and extending hospitality to strangers. The sharing of the Gospel and of the Eucharistic body of Christ in the different communities makes the individual members as well as the communities as a whole into a *koinonia* of solidarity of the one body of Christ. This understanding of the Church as communion is further developed by the Church fathers theologically and spiritually and implemented practically and structurally.

The decisive theological factors of this self-understanding and realization were the following.⁴ a) The church forms a communion in faith; the Creed is the basis of this *koinonia*, which is deeply disrupted by the heretics. The Church fathers regarded the deviation from faith not merely as an abstract issue of interpretation, but as basic violation of love (agape) of the *koinonia*, which embraces faith and praxis equally. b) The Church lives as a *koinonia* of sacraments (mysteries); this happens above all in baptism and Eucharist, the decisive sign and bond of communion (since the second century).

2. Trinitarian Ecclesiology

The Communion Ecclesiology has to do with the vision of the Petrine ministry, in which the pope is not an absolute monarch but the first among equals (patriarchs and bishops): *primus inter pares*. The crucial question is whether the curial officials⁵ in Vatican have to work as decision makers or as animators at the service of the pope and the college of bishops by encouraging discussion and consensus building. This has to do ultimately with the vision in which the Collegiality of the bishops as well as the primacy of the pope is to be kept in balance and healthy tension. This collegiality is to be realized in the model of the

⁴Cf. M. Kehl, 323ff.

⁵The Roman (Vatican) Curia is made up of the Secretariat of State, nine congregations, 12 councils, three tribunals, and a host of commissions, academies, institutes and other offices.

communion of fellowship in the Holy Trinity. It is true that Monarchianism was rejected by the Church as a Trinitarian heresy. This rejection is not to remain merely at the level of doctrine/dogma, but has to be translated also into the life of the church, including its administration. According to the theology of the Holy Trinity God is a community of persons, with intimate mutual sharing and indwelling, known as *circumincessio* (Latin) or *perichoresis* (Greek).

If the life of the Holy Trinity should not remain merely an item of academic and speculative theology, but affect and permeate every domain of the church, including its administrative set-up, the leaders in the church are not to be characterized merely by administrative efficiency but also by spiritual and pastoral leadership and example. The church needs not mere diplomats and managers but rather shepherds and persons of God who understand their office as the Lord's mandate to "feed and tend" the lambs and sheep (cf Jn 21:15-17). They should be also ready to give their life for the sheep (Jn 10:15). Pope Francis would hence demand from them humanity, humility and accountability.

3. More Humility and Humanity

In his Christmas address to the Vatican Curia on 22 December 2014 Pope Francis has appealed for more humility and humanity especially from the part of the ecclesiastical authorities. This is an appeal to see the faithful as "persons and not numbers". There have been reportedly various kinds of harassments the parishioners and the religious sometimes undergo at the hands of the church authorities and officials, in the form of giving no written reply to written petitions, not granting the rightful permission for sacraments (esp. baptism or marriage), extorting "donations" for projects decided arbitrarily and non-synodally. It is desirable that the functioning of the ecclesiastical offices be more fair, kind, polite, respectful, and people friendly. No one should be made to wait for a written reply for a written petition longer than six months.

It is not at all Christian and also not in the spirit of Pope Francis to sacrifice persons for the sake of the institution or for one's own benefits. But who is monitoring this? It is not enough that the church and other media report what the pope says in Rome; it has also to be implemented in the lived contexts and the concerned authorities should monitor it.

4. Bold Example!

Although in 2014 the Pope Francis spoke during his Christmas address to the cardinals on the several illnesses of the Roman curia it seems that not many have gone to the doctor for a therapy or acted consequently. Monsignor Erny Gillen (55), since 2011 the Vicar General of the diocese of Luxembourg, however, took a bold step⁶: In an open letter he, the former professor of Moral Theology and Ethics in Luxembourg, former President of Caritas Luxembourg and Vice-President of the International Caritas, criticized the luxurious life of many bishops who according to him have followed the Pope's instructions only nominally. In 2015 he resigned his post as the Vicar General and wrote an open letter to the Pope Francis, which appeared as an e-book (75 pages). In this letter Msgr Gillen writes that the only objective of the Church is to go out and to proclaim the Good News of Jesus Christ to the world. She must surge like a wave up to the periphery of existence, where people struggle with sin, pain, injustice, ignorance, indifference and religion. According to Gillen Jesus would be unhappy with the administration of the church state when he would come to visit us. The Church must move away from power. She must become a Church of God among the humans. Therefore Gillen suggests to the Pope to shift from the Vatican to the Lateran Basilica. Not only the Pope but also the administrative apparatus should move away from Vatican. The different commissions or congregations should reside in the metropolitan cities of the world. The Congregation for the Doctrine of the faith could, for example, move to Brazil. He makes it clear, however, that he is not pleading for doing away with the curia, but its healing.

5. Women Cardinals!

As a rejoinder to Gillen's suggestions we could add that although women could not be ordained priests, they could be created cardinals

⁶Cf. "Der Beulendoktor", *Themen und Trends. Die Woche im Spiegel der Medien*, 20, Nr 47 (2015), aus *Christ und Welt*, 17. Dezember 2015, Nr 51, 29-31.

without any theological problems, since cardinalship is not in itself a sacred order. So we had the so-called “lay cardinals” with minor orders, as was the practice in the Church until this was forbidden by the canon Law in 1917. The old practice could be now reintroduced and extended also to women. Cardinal Robert Sarah - the Prefect of the Congregation for Divine Worship and the Discipline of the Sacraments since 2014 - rejects in an interview the idea of a woman cardinal as ridiculous.⁷ The Cardinal does not give any reason; he states that “the idea of a female cardinal is ridiculous just as that of a priest, who wants to become a nun!”⁸ The cardinal’s argument presupposes that to become a cardinal is exactly similar to becoming a priest. The argument rests on the *a priori* assumption that cardinalship is exclusively reserved for men just as priesthood. But precisely this assumption is in question. It is true that a priest (who is a man) cannot become at the same time a nun! It is therefore, as the Cardinal rightly observes, ridiculous for a priest to try to become a nun. But whether this can equally be applied to women cardinals is a different issue, for there is no formal reason why women cannot be created cardinals. In the history of the church men without major orders were indeed created cardinals; cardinalship is not a sacred order! According to the cardinal the most important norm should not be sex or gender, but the loyalty to the will of the Lord, as the tradition of the Church has always understood it.⁹ There is nothing to object to this norm! But the system of cardinals as well as their ruling over a dicastery does not come from the Lord! It is perfectly alright not to confer an office to any person on the grounds of sex and gender. Not any person or man is made a cardinal but the one who is qualified for the job. In the same way, why not confer the task to women as well as laymen, if they are capable of doing the service? This issue is entirely different from the issue of women ordination. We do not question the official position of the church that Christ did not

⁷Robert Cardinal Sarah und Nicolas Diat, *Gott oder Nichts. Ein Gespräch über den Glauben*, Kißlegg (Medienverlag), 2015, 166.

⁸*Ibid.*, translation, mine.

⁹*Ibid.*, 167.

call women for the priestly office and that the church does not consider herself authorized to change this practice.¹⁰

Related to the issue of women cardinals is the theme of the modality of the election of the Pope. Instead of making it a monopoly of the college of cardinals, other members also could be given the active voting right, keeping, however, the present regulation regarding the passive voice. Just as women could be allowed as cardinals to participate in the election of the pope many other special members as representatives of the laity could be nominated *ad hoc* to participate in the papal election. The modality of this representation can be discussed and decided according to certain norms which can be based on continents and number of Catholics there. We could also think of the possibility of entrusting various other administrative functions and roles to women, such as Vicar Generals, diocesan Chancellors, financial administrators, etc.

6. Continuing Temptation of Power

It is no wonder if in the course of the development of the Church, unchristian conceptions of power would have “crept” (as in the garden of Paradise!) into her imagination and tempted her to adopt a culture of lord it over the subjects. She would have “plucked” the fascinating “fruit”. As a result, there could be gold-crowned “kings” in the Church, instead of Christ who was crowned with thorns! This applies to all leaders, not necessarily only the bishops. All those who are thus imprisoned need to be liberated, not only for their own sake but also for the sake of the others, whom they are expected to serve. Autocracy and arrogance are the twin children of power and authority in the worldly sense. In the Christian scheme the one who wishes to be the first has to be the servant/slave (Mt 20:27).

¹⁰Cf. The Declaration of the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith *Inter Insigniores* (15 Oct. 1976): AAS 69 (1977), 98-116; Apostolic Letter *ordinationis sacerdotialis* of John Paul II (22 May, 1994); cf. also the Apostolic Letter of John Paul II *Mulieris Dignitatem* (August 15, 1988), n. 26: AAS 80 (1988), 1715.

Power can even become sometimes bondage and imprisonment to those who possess it. They may become like kings in golden cage or chains. If you want to liberate these “kings” from their bondage and bring them to the experiences of the common person, you may have to snatch their ‘crowns of gold’. This is the theme of the play, “The Gold-crowned Jesus” by the Korean author Chi-Ha Kim. In this play, a beggar takes off the crown of gold from a cement statute of Jesus. As he does this, he hears a voice: “How eagerly I was waiting for this day to come, the day of my liberation... It’s you who liberated me.”

The way power and authority are exercised in the church is often deplorable. Especially when power is associated with divine mandate there is the greater chance of being misused. Precisely this has tempted the church authorities to be very much conscious of their status in an arrogant way. Self-glory takes often the place of service.

Delegation of certain powers to the laity is also a way of liberation. The present scenario of the priest having all power and authority as a monopoly even in matters pertaining to the material structure and day to day needs of the Church is really vexing and taxing. The priests could be made free for the proper sacramental and spiritual and pastoral care of the folk, rather than nailed to all the minute temporal affairs of the parish, which a competent body of the laity can easily take up. In such realms the laity is at least equally competent and qualified as or often more than the clergy. This has to be admitted in all truth and humility. We have to take our lay brethren in confidence and if training is needed we have to impart them qualified training.

Not merely from the point of view of the theology of the Holy Trinity but also from a consideration of the kenosis (self-emptying) of Jesus Christ beginning with the Incarnation and culminating in the death on the cross the Church has to think of new forms of authority and power. In other words, a theology of the powerless God demands radical forms of service and persuasive authority as truly Christian way of exercising the role of leadership in the Church. A theology of the cross that demonstrates God’s weakness and foolishness (cf. 1 Cor 1:25) has something to say to the Church with regard to the exercise of power

and governance. Collegiality, humility, dialogue and service are the compatible forms arising out of a spirituality of kenosis and the cross. This would, of course, affect also the structure of the Church for better. We are not pleading for a Church without hierarchy or structure; we need them all, for Jesus has willed this for his Church, his visible body. We are appealing, however, for a life-style and work-style from the part of every Christian leader corresponding to the way of God, who made himself weak for the sake of love, retaining his power of persuasion. This is a moral and spiritual power that can appeal to our freedom, a power much more effective than any other form of power.

7. Need of Inculturation

Inculturation is a much-discussed theme everywhere in the Church today. The Liturgy seems to have been the primary or perhaps even the exclusive field of concern and application in this regard. Matters related to life style, spirituality, governance etc. are thereby often ignored. Inculturation of power and authority in the Church ought to have been an important item of discussion and decision-making. This is more important than the externals such as the shape of the bishop's mitre and staff. A serious consideration on this matter is desirable at least in the Asian context. Religious leaders of Asia are leaders not by appointment, but by reception; they are not managers, executives or administrators, but spiritual gurus and animators who have experienced God and who can lead others to God-experience. People seek and approach them precisely for this.

It is true that according to 1Tim 3:1 "whoever aspires to the office of bishop desires a noble task". Whatever be the original meaning of the term 'bishop' (Overseer or Superintendent), the office of the bishop remains a coveted post and an object of ambition. What could and would be the motivation behind this? The ardent desire to serve the Church, or the power and prestige attached to it? Undoubtedly, the office of the bishop is even today a holy and noble task. There is, of course, nothing unholy or unduly about aspiring to this office. It should not be, however, desired for individual honour and personal prestige, but as a spiritual duty and an ecclesiastical responsibility.

As the successors of the Apostles, the bishops have a special leadership role in their respective dioceses and in the whole Church for the cause of Christ and the kingdom of God. They should think that they are not accountable to anybody on this earth, or that they have the sole and direct access to the Holy Spirit. This kind of a false and unbiblical self-understanding could be nourished and promoted by an uncritical and often ingratiating mentality from the side of the people at large. Due respect to any authority and for that matter authority in the Church is, of course, an important value and duty of every believer. But this should not develop into person cult. Many unhealthy developments in the society and the Church could be checked by due and proper constructive criticism out of love at the right time and the humble readiness and sincere openness to listen to it.

We may remember that in the discussions at the Second Vatican Council it was strongly pointed out that the dogmatic constitution on the Church has to bring out the nature of the Church as a communion in the spirit of humble service and not as an institution of power. The Constitution *Lumen Gentium* art. 8 points out that the Church has to follow the example of Christ, who emptied himself, became poor to serve and save us. Article 20 speaks of the office of the bishop as an office of service.

8. Need of Renewal

The *Lineamenta* on "The Bishop: Servant of the Gospel of Jesus Christ for the Hope of the World" (1998) frankly admits the need of recognizing "in a humble gesture of repentance, that at certain moments in history the episcopal ministry was seen by some, more as a form of power and prestige and less an expression of service" (no.8). This need not be completely a story and history of the past. Even in the present, we may come across attitudes and imaginations about the bishop that smack of power and prestige in a worldly sense.

Pope Paul VI in his *motuproprio* Letter *Pontificalia insignia* (21 June 1968) and the Instruction *Utsivesollicite* (31 March 1969) had addressed the external aspects of the office of the Bishop. Both documents treated a bishop's bearings and attire, seeking to simplify

them and imbue them with a more humble and modest spirit. The changes, however, were not limited solely to the external aspects. The renewed considerations of the image of the Bishop revolved around primarily on its spiritual and moral significance, which was based upon the fundamental charism of the Bishop as successor of the Apostles.

The Church should be a model of and instrument for authentic communities based on the Kingdom values, such as love, justice, service, equality, etc. Accordingly, the bishop as the leader has to be a person of God and his kingly reign. His duty is "not merely to do things rightly, fairly and justly but more importantly to do the right thing, the fair thing and the just thing". He should be a man of the Spirit, a spiritual man who leads and animates people to be spiritual. He must be simple and humble; his life-style choices will and should reflect this. Pope Paul VI once said, "Modern man listens more willingly to witnesses than to teachers, and if he listens to teachers it is because they are witnesses". This is all the more true of the situation in Asia. The secret of the great success of Mother Theresa of Kolkata is precisely this. She won the hearts of millions of Indians because of her life of witness. She lived Christ. Her spiritual energy was visible in her deeds of charity. She is remembered not for her administrative power or huge institutions, rather for her spirituality that was translated into love of the poor and the needy.

9. The Model of the St Thomas Christians of India

As a model of synodal structure at the parish level we can see the parish assembly of the early Mar Thoma Christians of India. Until the 16th century when the Western missionaries entered the Indian soil, the bishops were mainly spiritual guides (sanctifiers) and teachers; they were less of "governors" or administrators. This was in accordance with the traditional Oriental understanding. The government of the flock was decentralised. The local clergy with the parish assembly (*palliyôgam*) used to manage the local affairs. Only extra-ordinary cases were referred to the episcopal "curia", which was headed by the Archdeacon, who was the local priest. The Archdeacon had a free hand in the central administration of the Church. He could exercise "all kinds of executive powers, namely, the gubernative, the

administrative and the coercive powers.” Of course, the bishop was *de iure* the superintendent, the judge in the government and administration of the Church.

The Latin bishops, appointed over the St Thomas Christians, changed the traditional Oriental system. They wanted to centralise the exercise of jurisdiction in the bishop himself. That became the root-cause of great troubles for the Church of the St Thomas Christians under the Latin bishops.

10. Need of Survey and Feedback

How far does the situation of each diocese and country correspond to the vision of Jesus Christ with regard to the actual exercise of power and authority? A realistic picture of what is going on in each diocese and how the people feel about their bishops and clergy could be a great help by being an eye-opener to those who sincerely want it. This could be an incentive for renewal, if taken in the proper spiritual sense. The bishop himself or the competent higher authorities could find out ways to get an objective feed-back from the people including those of other religions. Institution analysis is applied in many secular branches for the sake of improvement of the performance. Critical feedbacks and surveys from time to time could help the concerned instances to be aware of the suppressed reaction of the people and to take timely appropriate action. If the leaders are interested only to be in the good book of the “high command”, their allegiance to the people will suffer, as is seen in the political scenario in India after the elections. Periodical survey and feedback regarding the performance of ecclesiastical leaders could be in this sense helpful. This can be included as an item and part of the official meeting of the bishops with the pope in Rome, known as the visit to the tombs of the apostles Peter and Paul (*ad limina apostolorum*), or independent of it.

11. Conclusion: Love as Test and Task

We preach and believe in a God who so loved the world as to give his own and only son for our eternal life (Jn 3:16). This message of Christian faith has to be made credible and visible through the example of the leaders in the Church. An arrogant and authoritarian attitude

will only discredit the Church and bring many of the flock away from her. Christian leadership has to seriously meditate over this and make needed changes in attitude and behaviour. Just as Christ loved his people to the end, so, too, are the Christian leaders to love the flock selflessly. That is the true test of Christian authority. This will make the leaders in the Church really powerful in Spirit. They will become then shepherds performing pastoral *ministry*, which means service. In this way they will follow the lofty example of the Good Shepherd who became weak and powerless by emptying himself and taking the form of a slave (servant).

